

# MAKING THE MOST OF OUR PARKS

Citizens Budget Commission  
June 2007



New York's Nonpartisan Voice for Effective Government

## FOREWORD

Founded in 1932, the Citizens Budget Commission (CBC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan civic organization devoted to influencing constructive change in the finances and services of New York State and New York City governments. A major activity of the Commission is conducting research on the workings of municipal agencies and identifying ways to enhance their services and productivity.

In 1991, the CBC, with the support of New York City Parks Council, analyzed management issues facing the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) at a time when the City was financially strained. The recommendations in that report helped set an agenda for the Parks Council's advocacy and for reforms at the DPR. Since the 1991 report, fiscal conditions have improved remarkably, but management of the DPR has become increasingly complex. The proliferation of nonprofit park conservancies, changes in the composition of the workforce, and an expanded parks system pose both challenges and opportunities for improving the public's benefit from the parks within New York City.

At the request of New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P), the successor agency to the Parks Council and a civic organization committed to supporting the improvement of public parks, the CBC revisited the issue of how to best manage the municipal park system. The Robert Sterling Clark Foundation and the Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors generously made grants to NY4P to help support this effort. The staff of NY4P, headed by Christian DiPalermo, played an important role in helping to facilitate the research, but the CBC is responsible for the findings and recommendations in this report.

All research by the CBC is overseen by a committee of its Trustees. For this report an ad hoc committee, the Parks Research Committee, was established. We serve as co-chairs of that Committee. The other members are Paul Alter, Paul Balser, Kenneth Bond, Kenneth Gibbs, H. Dale Hemmerdinger, Deborah Jackson, Peter Kiernan, Andrew Lynn, Robinson Markel, Deborah Sale, Peter Samton, Richard Sigal, Joan Steinberg, Cynthia Vance, and James Lipscomb, ex-officio. The Committee members' interest, expertise and dialogue at their meetings made an important contribution to the quality of the report.

Charles Brecher, Executive Vice President and Research Director and Oliver Wise, Research Associate wrote the report. Charles Brecher is also Professor of Public Health and Administration at the New York University Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service. William F. Hattar, Administrative and Research Consultant, Corey Kunz, Communications and Public Affairs Associate, and Tammy Pels, Research Associate provided research support. Corey Kunz also formatted the document.

The report was prepared with the cooperation and assistance of many people closely involved with and highly knowledgeable about managing New York's parks. DPR Commissioner Adrian Benepe graciously offered the cooperation of the Department's staff; Assistant Commissioner Jack Linn served as our liaison. Jack's help was invaluable in collecting relevant data, providing historical background, and connecting the research staff with the appropriate officials in the DPR for additional information. Stuart Klein and Joe Jarin of the New York City Office of Management and Budget shared relevant data and

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insights with the Commission staff. Others who made time in their busy schedules to share their perspectives with the authors are Doug Blonsky, Central Park Conservancy; Drew Becher, New York Restoration Project; Tessa Huxley, Battery Park City Parks Conservancy; Warrie Price, The Battery Conservancy; Dan Biederman, Bryant Park Corporation; Debbie Landau, Madison Square Conservancy; Karen Cohen, Randall's Island Sports Foundation; Tupper Thomas, Prospect Park Alliance; Connie Fishman, Hudson River Park Trust; Henry Stern, New York Civic; Robert Pirani, Regional Plan Association; Peter Harnik, Trust for Public Land, and Wilbur Woods, New York City Planning Department. Many of these individuals also reviewed a preliminary draft of this report and provided helpful comments. The Parks Research Committee and the CBC staff thank all these individuals for their assistance. Their participation in the research process is evidence of their commitment to improving park services in New York, but it does not necessarily mean that they agree with our findings and recommendations.

W. James Tozer, Jr.  
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June 25, 2007

## **PREFACE**

**by**

### **New Yorkers for Parks**

In 2008, New Yorkers for Parks, as the successor to several distinguished organizations, will celebrate 100 years of advocating for quality park and recreation services for all New Yorkers. Our long history allows us to provide some perspective on the highs and lows of New York City's impressive park system. As the current administration moves forward with its ambitious and necessary PlaNYC 2030 initiative, New York City can enhance the delivery of park and recreation services in every community.

Prior to 1908, most of the City's parkland existed in large swaths like Central Park and Prospect Park. With the ascension of Robert Moses to Parks Commissioner, the number of acres dedicated to parkland exploded. Soon, the challenge became how best to maintain this emerald empire. As Robert Moses noted to the former Chair of our organization, Iphigene Ochs Sulzberger, "now that the park system has been created, it is the responsibility of the next generation to maintain it." However, as the City's responsibilities and obligations grew, resources for parks became more and more scarce.

At a particularly low point, between 1991 and 1992, the Parks Department's budget was cut over 20 percent, resulting in lay-offs and hiring freezes. Concurrently, our predecessor organization, the Parks Council, asked the Citizens Budget Commission (CBC) to complete a report on the Parks Department entitled *Managing the Department of Parks and Recreation in a Period of Fiscal Stress*, released in 1991. The report called for greater productivity, the expansion of philanthropy, and the ability of the Parks Department to retain some of the revenue raised through higher fees and licenses. The report helped to guide our organization's efforts for the next 15 years.

In 2006, in light of the transformed fiscal condition of the City, we began working with the CBC on a refreshed set of assessments and recommendations. The most significant accomplishment since the first report has been the substantial increase in philanthropy and other private support for public parks, which has transformed some of our better-known green spaces into nationally and internationally acclaimed urban oases. Through their diverse organizational structures, innovative management strategies, and access to additional resources, these parks have become part of the essential infrastructure that makes New York City unique. Central Park is the second most visited tourist attraction in the City next to Times Square, for good reason.

Unfortunately, these advances in park management have not extended their reach throughout all five boroughs, and many communities still struggle with insufficient park resources. Both the Parks Department's Park Inspection Program and New Yorkers for Parks' award-winning Report Card on Parks clearly show that low-income communities disproportionately suffer from inferior park conditions. The challenge facing our City in the next century will be to create a park system that can take the successes of parks like Central, Prospect and Bryant and match their managerial prowess with additional public resources to provide a quality park for every neighborhood in New York City.

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Mayor Bloomberg, through his PlaNYC 2030 effort, has provided an unprecedented opportunity to improve parks and open spaces throughout the City. In order to achieve PlaNYC's ambitious goal of every New Yorker living within 10 minutes of a park, we must concurrently implement many of the strategies recommended in this report so that New Yorkers arrive at a clean, green and safe park after their 10-minute walk. Quality neighborhood parks are those that have recreational programming, horticultural excellence and consistent maintenance attention.

*Making the Most of our Parks* is a “green print” for how to maintain our parks in a fiscally prudent and effective way. New Yorkers for Parks is dedicated to ensuring that many of these recommendations come to fruition through our advocacy, community outreach, planning and research. We simply cannot afford to pass off the responsibility of maintaining our parkland to the next generation.

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## INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Parks play important roles in city life. They are a source of respite from the bustle of the urban environment, providing open space for passive enjoyment. Parks also provide a place for active recreation and exercise for adults and a safe place for children to play outdoors. In addition, parks enhance the aesthetic quality of life in urban settings, preserve sensitive environmental areas, and, by making neighborhoods more attractive, enhance property values and the tax base of the city.

Given the benefits of urban parks, it should be reassuring to New Yorkers that more than 37,000 acres, or nearly one-fifth the city's total land area, is parkland. This proportion is larger than in most big cities in the United States, suggesting that New Yorkers are well endowed with parks.

But New Yorkers face a distinct challenge in enjoying their parks. Located in the nation's largest city in terms of resident population, New York's parks must accommodate an unparalleled volume of people. New York has about 219 residents for each acre of parkland, one of the highest ratios in the nation, compared to a national average among large cities of about 55 residents per acre and a figure of just 28 residents per acre in San Diego.<sup>1</sup> When the extraordinarily large number of commuters and tourists is added to New York's resident population, the potential demand on local parks likely is greater than in any other American city. New Yorkers must be especially innovative in order to make the most of their parks.

This report is intended to find ways to help achieve that goal. It recognizes that the leadership of the agency with the largest responsibility for parks in New York, the municipal Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), has been addressing this challenge for many years and has made significant progress. The Citizens Budget Commission last analyzed the management issues confronting the DPR in 1991, a time when local parks were in generally poor condition and when the City faced significant fiscal stress.<sup>2</sup> Since then the city's economy and fiscal condition have improved greatly, and the DPR has made major strides in improving the condition of parks – often using strategies consistent with the CBC's recommendations. The DPR has improved the quality and cleanliness of parks. Its leaders have developed and refined a well-regarded performance measurement tool to gauge park quality that is integrated in the DPR's management system. They have been innovative in their staffing, effectively using temporary workers enrolled in public assistance programs and successfully contracting out selected services. The DPR has also increased philanthropic support to supplement public resources for parks.

These accomplishments are accompanied by a new set of challenges. Given the emphasis on parks in Mayor Michael Bloomberg's recent PlaNYC initiative, the major parks expansion

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<sup>1</sup> Data from The Trust for Public Land [www.tpl.org/ccpe](http://www.tpl.org/ccpe), May 14, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Citizens Budget Commission, *Managing the Department of Parks and Recreation in a Period of Fiscal Stress*, March 1991.

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projects in development, and the concomitant investment in DPR's operating and capital budgets, this report addresses ways in which the City can make the most of its growing parks system. More can be done, and the CBC seeks to help set the agenda for future enhancements of New York's park system.

The report is organized into five sections. The first describes the DPR's facilities, noting the growth in those facilities and the plans for expanding them in the future. The next three sections analyze the management practices of the DPR focusing on (a) the resources made available to DPR from the City budget and from independent nonprofit and quasi-governmental organizations, (b) performance measurement and staffing practices, and (c) revenue generating practices and the incentives to optimize such opportunities.

This analysis points to six current issues on which the DPR should focus:

- *Greater incentives are needed to pursue earned revenues, primarily from concessions.* With just a few exceptions, the City now retains all revenues generated in the parks to support its general operations; DPR managers have limited incentives to optimize these revenues.
- *No comprehensive, strategic plan guides expansion of the parks network.* As a result, priorities for expansion are not clear, and there is a risk that inadequate resources will be provided for maintenance of expanded facilities or that existing parks will suffer as limited resources are spread thin.
- *All parks are not kept in acceptable condition, and parks in poorer neighborhoods are more likely to be in worse condition than parks in wealthier neighborhoods.* While parks have improved overall and the gap in quality between parks in poor neighborhoods and wealthy neighborhoods has narrowed considerably, problems in park maintenance persist. About one of eight parks citywide is not in acceptable condition, and there is a significant correlation between a community district's share of parks in unacceptable condition and its average income level.
- *The DPR has no objective measures of park use and the efficiency of delivering park services.* Better management requires improved information about park use and the unit cost of services.
- *Borrowed funds are used for routine repairs and replacements, creating incentives to limit preventive maintenance and to replace equipment and facilities more rapidly than might otherwise be necessary.* The municipal capital, rather than operating, budget pays for these items, leading to the temptation to use more borrowed funds than is necessary or appropriate.
- *The multiple, new arrangements with nonprofit partner organizations that help manage the parks have not been made fully transparent and have not been established in accord with consistent guidelines for how to encourage philanthropy, how to divide responsibilities between DPR and its partners, and how to divide concession revenues between the City and its partners.* At least 50 distinct nonprofit organizations help manage New York's parks, with most established since 1991. Some diversity in the arrangements is expected and warranted, but these entities ought to be treated in a more consistent manner financially and operationally.

The final section makes six recommendations to address these issues:

1. *Create a stronger incentive for increasing concession and other earned revenues by dividing growth in these*



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*revenues between the City's general fund and a new fund dedicated to parks improvements.* This should be a source of substantial new revenue for bringing all parks into acceptable condition and adding to park facilities and programs.

2. *Institutionalize responsibility for strategic planning for parks.* An entity within municipal government and with a clear mandate from City Hall should be engaged in ongoing planning for parks and the coordination of municipal and other park facilities.

3. *Bring all parks to an acceptable condition.* The strategic plan should include a timetable for bringing all parks facilities to an acceptable condition. New resources dedicated to the DPR should be targeted to the parks with the greatest need.

4. *Improve the quality and productivity in parks maintenance and operations.* This will require establishing measures of park use and unit costs, experimenting with contracting-out and other innovations to lower unit costs.

5. *Encourage preventive maintenance and longer periods of usefulness by funding routine repairs and replacements in the operating budget.* A multiyear program for shifting funds from the capital to the operating budget should be initiated.

6. *Common principles should guide the relationships between the DPR and its nonprofit partner organizations and the terms of arrangements should be transparent.* Clear and consistent policies should be established to encourage philanthropic support, define responsibilities and allocate concession revenues and all arrangements should be articulated in publicly accessible documents.

## PARK FACILITIES

Municipal government is not alone in the effort to provide New Yorkers with adequate parks. As Table 1 shows, the DPR is responsible for about three-quarters of the local parks system, but significant roles are played by the federal and State government, quasi-governmental public authorities, and private organizations. This section describes the facilities operated by each major organization and the plans underway to expand these facilities.

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**Table 1**  
**Parks and Open Spaces in New York City, 2006**  
(acres)

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
<b>City Parks</b>	<b>29,025</b>	<b>77.7%</b>
<b>National Parks</b>	<b>6,982</b>	<b>18.7%</b>
<b>State Parks</b>	<b>975</b>	<b>2.6%</b>
 <b>Public Authority Parks</b>	 <b>278</b>	 <b>0.7%</b>
Battery Park City Authority	35	
Hudson River Park Trust	100	
Brooklyn Bridge Park Development Corporation	77	
Governors Island Preservation and Education Corporation	40	
Economic Development Corporation	26	
 <b>Privately Owned Public Spaces</b>	 <b>82</b>	 <b>0.2%</b>
 <b>Total</b>	 <b>37,342</b>	 <b>100.0%</b>

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Sources: See text.

Notes: Acreage is only for areas on land. Areas under water are excluded.

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### The DPR's Facilities

The DPR's more than 29,000 acres are divided among 1,911 separate parcels of land, but about 84 percent of the land is accounted for by 457 parks. (See Table 2.) Of these parks, 53 are relatively large (over 100 acres), 69 are more modest in scale (20-100 acres), and 335 are relatively small parks (under 20 acres). The largest parks comprise 69 percent of the DPR's total land. These large parks include the ones most familiar to tourists and residents including Central Park (843 acres), Prospect Park (526 acres), Flushing Meadows (1,255 acres), Forest Park (538 acres), Pelham Bay Park (2,766 acres), Van Cortlandt Park (1,146

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acres) and the Greenbelt on Staten Island (984 acres).<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the parks, the DPR is responsible for 1,454 parcels of non-park properties which comprise 4,643 acres or about 15 percent of the DPR's total land. The largest component is 2,895 acres located along major roadways; these tracts are large enough to house some recreational facilities as well as provide for open space that enhances the appearance of highways. The DPR is also responsible for numerous smaller parcels of land located in the middle of roadways (malls and strips) or at intersections of roads (circles, squares and triangles). They typically are not large enough to house recreational facilities and account for less than 1 percent of DPR's total land.

The other major component of the DPR's facilities is 542 free standing playgrounds. These are relatively small parcels of land equipped with facilities for children such as swings and sand boxes. Other playgrounds are part of the recreational facilities located in parks. As shown in Table 2, the DPR has a total of 990 playgrounds located in all its properties. Of this total, 269 are playgrounds located adjacent to public schools. The playgrounds at public schools are available for school children during school hours and are also made available to the general public at other times. These properties are designated as "jointly operated" with the Department of Education, but it is the DPR's responsibility to maintain them. It should be noted that many other public schools have recreational facilities on their property, but these are not typically open to the general public, are not operated by the DPR, and are not counted in the DPR's inventory summarized in Table 2. In addition, a nonprofit organization that builds playgrounds in schoolyards estimates that roughly 225 schoolyards do not have playground equipment.<sup>4</sup>

The diverse recreational purposes other than playgrounds for which DPR land is used are suggested by the facilities listed in Table 2. Literally thousands of basketball and handball courts are concentrated in the playground sites, but are also located in many parks. The 857 sports fields are spread among numerous sites, with 311 in the largest parks. The DPR also has six skating rinks and 14 golf courses. The 44 pools are divided between parks and other facilities, while the 19 mini-pools are found almost exclusively at free standing playgrounds.

The DPR is also responsible for maintaining "street trees." These are trees owned by the City and located outside of parks. They may be found in malls and squares, but are frequently in portions of sidewalks along public streets. A 2006 census identified 592,130 street trees for which DPR is responsible.<sup>5</sup>

Because the DPR is responsible for property located close to streets and schools, it develops working relationships with other municipal agencies. The links to the Departments of Sanitation and Transportation were codified in a 1983 memorandum still in effect. With respect to the Department of Transportation (DOT), the DPR is responsible for maintaining street trees and for maintaining landscaped traffic islands and medians (now known as greenstreets); the DOT maintains non-landscaped islands and medians in addition to streets that run through park property. The Department of Sanitation (DSNY) removes the snow

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<sup>3</sup> [www.nyc.gov/parks](http://www.nyc.gov/parks)

<sup>4</sup> Estimated by Out 2 Play. Statistics available at [www.out2play.org](http://www.out2play.org)

<sup>5</sup> [http://nycgovparks.org/sub\\_your\\_park/trees\\_greenstreets/treescount/index.php](http://nycgovparks.org/sub_your_park/trees_greenstreets/treescount/index.php)

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on streets that run through parks property, but DPR is responsible for other snow removal in the parks. The DSNY is also responsible for cleaning the “tree pits” that house the street trees and emptying trash receptacles on park property. DPR also maintains playgrounds jointly operated with the Department of Education, but DPR does not maintain playgrounds on property owned by the New York City Housing Authority.

Not included in Table 2 are the five stadiums owned by the DPR: Keyspan Park in Brooklyn, Yankee Stadium in the Bronx, Shea Stadium and the USTA Billie Jean King Tennis Center in Queens, and Icahn Stadium on Randalls Island.

- Keyspan Park is home to the minor league baseball Brooklyn Cyclones. The Cyclones pay a nominal rental fee to the DPR and are responsible for the maintenance of the stadium. The Cyclones keep all revenues from the operations of the park. Keyspan Park was opened in 2001 and represents an addition to the DPR’s facilities since 1991.
- The USTA Billie Jean King Tennis Center (which includes Arthur Ashe Stadium) in Queens was constructed with private capital from the United States Tennis Association. The USTA maintains the center and gives a portion of the revenues earned in the facility to the City. In fiscal year 2006, the USTA paid \$2.1 million to the City. When the US Open is not running, the facility is open to the public.
- Icahn Stadium, located on Randalls Island in the East River, was built by the Randall’s Island Sports Foundation to replace Downing Stadium. Icahn Stadium, used exclusively for track and field events, is operated and maintained by the Randalls Island Sports Foundation, which keeps the revenues earned through its use.
- Yankee and Shea Stadiums are currently being rebuilt and the clubs’ financial relationship to the DPR will change when the new stadiums are completed. Under the current arrangement the City receives rental payments from the clubs, which are calculated as a percentage of the club’s gross ticket and concession revenues. The Yankees may deduct maintenance costs from their payments to the DPR, while the Mets cannot. In the new arrangement, the DPR is leasing the sites to the New York City Industrial Development Agency (IDA), which will then sublease the site to the ball clubs. The teams will pay PILOTs (payments in lieu of taxes) and rent to the IDA in order to repay IDA-issued bonds. The DPR will no longer receive any revenues from the operations of the two stadiums.

Table 2  
Department of Parks and Recreation Facilities, 2007

	<u>Number of Properties</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Playgrounds</u>	<u>Basketball Hoops</u>	<u>Handball Courts</u>	<u>Sports Fields</u>	<u>Tennis Courts</u>	<u>Skating Rinks</u>	<u>Golf Courses</u>	<u>Pools</u>	<u>Mini-Pools</u>
<b>Total</b>	1,911	29,025	990	2,407	1,874	857	702	6	14	44	19
<b>Parks</b>	457	24,382	364	847	850	664	545	6	14	28	1
Parks over 100 acres	53	19,894	124	216	224	311	260	5	14	4	-
Parks of 20-100 acres	69	3,028	52	152	196	149	113	-	-	7	-
Parks under 20 acres	335	1,460	188	479	430	204	172	1	-	17	1
<b>Other DPR Properties</b>	1,454	4,643	626	1,560	1,024	193	157	-	-	16	18
Free Standing Playgrounds	542	797	542	1,462	995	146	124	-	-	-	18
Circles, Triangles & Squares	145	62	8	5	2	2	9	-	-	-	-
Parkway Land	19	2,895	8	28	-	5	-	-	-	-	-
Other	748	889	68	65	27	40	24	-	-	16	-

Source: New York City Department of Parks and Recreation.

The DPR's park system has expanded significantly since 1982.<sup>6</sup> (See Table 3.) The number of properties is up 20 percent from 1,533 to 1,911, yielding an increase of 3,967 acres. The large increase in the number of properties is due primarily to the "Greenstreets" program. The DPR aggressively sought to take control of and landscape numerous small parcels of land located at traffic medians. However, because these parcels are small, the Greenstreets program accounts for a much smaller share of the expansion in parks acreage. Nearly two-thirds of the new parkland (2,217 acres) is on Staten Island, due to expansions of the Greenbelt, the partial opening of the Fresh Kills Park (814 acres), the opening of the 226-acre Staten Island Industrial Park, and the opening of the 107-acre Mariner's Marsh Park. Smaller new parks were opened in the other four boroughs.

**Table 3**  
**Department of Parks and Recreation Facilities, 1982 and 2006**

	<u>1982</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>Change</u>	<u>Percent Change</u>
Park Acres	25,058	29,025	3,967	14%
Park Properties	1,533	1,911	378	20%
Parks over 100 Acres	39	53	14	26%
Parks of 20-100 Acres	41	69	28	41%
Parks under 20 Acres	399	335	(64)	-19%
Other Properties	1,054	1,454	400	28%
Recreation Facilities				
Playgrounds	838	990	152	15%
Athletic Fields	760	857	97	11%
Comfort Stations	635	576	(59)	-10%
Tennis Courts	627	702	75	11%
Swimming Pools	46	44	(2)	-5%
Recreation and Community Centers	29	36	7	19%
Miles of Beaches	14	14	-	0%
Golf Courses	13	14	1	7%
Ice Rinks	6	6	-	0%
Stadiums	4	5	1	20%
Zoos	3	5	2	40%

Source: New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

The DPR increased not only its land, but also its recreational facilities. For example, the number of playgrounds increased from 838 to 990, the number of athletic fields increased from 760 to 857; the number of tennis courts increased from 627 to 702; and the number of recreation center increased from 29 to 36. However, about 10 percent of the comfort stations in parks were closed, often because the DPR was not able to maintain them properly

<sup>6</sup> The CBC's 1991 report used unpublished data from the DPR on facilities as of 1982; this was the most recent data available at that time.

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and ensure their safety. However, an additional 82 buildings on parks property contain public restrooms.

## Other New York City Parks

The DPR's facilities are not the only parks available to New Yorkers, and the role of the DPR is shaped by the availability of alternative and complementary facilities owned and operated by others. Major types of facilities outside DPR are federal parks, New York State parks, parks maintained by public authorities, public spaces owned by private entities, and privately owned parks and recreation facilities.

**National Parks.** The federal government operates a vast complex of parks and recreational facilities. Nationwide there are more than 390 facilities encompassing about 84 million acres.<sup>7</sup> New Yorkers can visit any of these facilities, but few are nearby. Nonetheless, significant federal parks are within and adjacent to the city's boundaries.

The largest federal park within the city is the Gateway National Recreation Area in Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island. It covers a total of 23,982 acres, but about 17,000 acres are underwater, leaving an estimated 6,982 acres of land.<sup>8</sup> Much of this park is wildlife preserve, but the facility includes some recreational parks and beaches such as Great Kills Park. However, a survey of 28 national facilities by the National Parks Conservation Association gave Gateway the lowest quality grade of all the parks.<sup>9</sup> Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn, which is part of the Gateway National Recreational Area, is also host to the Aviator Sports and Recreation Center. This private facility offers sports facilities to users for a fee.

More frequently visited federal facilities are the Statue of Liberty and its surrounding grounds (12 acres), Ellis Island with its museum (32 acres), and Castle Clinton National Monument at the lower tip of Manhattan (roughly one acre). Also noteworthy is Governor's Island, a federal property being partially transferred to the City; it currently includes 22 acres of national parkland. When these facilities are combined with other smaller historical sites under federal jurisdiction, the total federal parkland in New York City totals 24,342 acres, of which 7,004 are on land.<sup>10</sup>

**State Parks.** Two New York State agencies share major responsibilities for parks and recreational facilities. The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is responsible for more than 3 million acres of State owned land in the Adirondacks and Catskills. It operates 52 campgrounds and six day-use areas in the Forest Preserve.<sup>11</sup> The DEC also maintains 638 acres of publicly available open space in New York City.<sup>12</sup> These spaces are

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<sup>7</sup> [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov)

<sup>8</sup> [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov)

<sup>9</sup> National Parks Conservation Association Center for the State of the Parks, "Park Assessment: Gateway National Recreation Area," May 2007.

<sup>10</sup> [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov)

<sup>11</sup> Park and Trails New York, *Parks at a Turning Point: Restoring and Enhancing New York's State Park System*, (Parks and Trails New York, November 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Trust for Public Land website: [www.tpl.org](http://www.tpl.org)

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largely nature preserves.

The State's Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) has 211 sites spanning about 325,000 acres.<sup>13</sup> The facilities include beaches, swimming pools, golf courses, marinas, nature centers, camp sites and historically significant buildings. While all are available to New York City residents, only six State parks with a total of 337 acres are within New York City. Clay Pit Ponds State Park Preserve on Staten Island with 260 acres is the largest and is one of the few areas in New York City that offers horse-back riding. Manhattan's Riverbank State Park occupies 28 acres largely on top of a sewage treatment plant and contains an indoor pool, ice rink, and a waterfront amphitheater. Roberto Clemente State Park in the Bronx comprises 25 acres. Queens has two State parks; Gantry Plaza State Park at 2.5 acres and Bayswater Point State Park at 12 acres. Brooklyn has nine acres in Empire-Fulton Ferry State Park, which includes a waterfront boardwalk.<sup>14</sup>

**Public Authorities.** As the CBC has noted, public authorities play an important role in public service provision in New York.<sup>15</sup> While perhaps most notable in areas such as transportation and housing, the role of these authorities extends to recreational services. At least eight authorities have parks within their jurisdiction:

1. Battery Park City Authority, a State authority that develops and operates housing and other buildings in lower Manhattan, operates 35 acres of parks in its complex. These parks are maintained by the Battery Park City Parks Conservancy, a nonprofit organization supported by the authority.
2. Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation, a State authority that develops and operates housing on Roosevelt Island, has four parks on its grounds: South Point Park, Blackwell Park, Ecological Park, and Lighthouse Park.
3. The Hudson River Park Trust, governed by a board of State and City appointees, is managing the development of the Hudson River Park, a 550-acre park stretching from Lower Manhattan to West 59<sup>th</sup> Street. Roughly 400 of those 550 acres are underwater.
4. The New York City Housing Authority owns and maintains 344 separate housing complexes. Its facilities include a large, but unknown, number of acres, including about 300 playgrounds and other recreational spaces and facilities.
5. The Brooklyn Bridge Park Development Corporation (BBPDC) owns 85 acres of property along the East River in Brooklyn. Roughly 77 acres will be developed into parkland; 65 of these acres will be upland, 12 acres will be water acres safe for canoeing and kayaking. A hotel and other commercial property will be built on the remaining eight acres. The board of BBPDC is made up five City appointees and six State appointees.
6. The Governor's Island Preservation and Education Corporation, a joint City and State

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> [www.nysparks.state.ny.us](http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us)

<sup>15</sup> Citizens Budget Commission, *Public Authorities in New York State*, (CBC, April 2006) and *New York's Public Authorities: Promoting Accountability and Taming Debt*, (CBC, September 2006).



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authority, is developing 87 acres of parkland on Governor's Island along with other potential commercial and cultural projects. This acreage is an addition to the 22 acres of federal parkland on Governor's Island.

7. The Economic Development Corporation, a nonprofit corporation under retainer with the City and working closely with the New York City Industrial Development Authority, owns land and buildings being developed with various types of public subsidies. In its portfolio are six sites used as or planned to be parkland. This portfolio totals 26 acres. The largest of these sites is the planned East River Waterfront Esplanade, which is 17 acres.<sup>16</sup>

8. The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, a public authority governed by a board appointed with representatives from the states of New York and New Jersey, has several open spaces adjacent to its facilities. These spaces include small parcels of land near the Manhattan entrance to the Lincoln Tunnel and near JFK International Airport.

**Privately Owned Public Spaces.** New York City is distinctive, if not unique, in having a significant amount of public space that is privately owned. Most of these park-like spaces were built as a result of the 1961 Zoning Resolution, which provided density zoning bonuses for commercial and residential buildings in exchange for the development of public spaces. At last count in 2000, there were 503 such privately owned public spaces. They comprised a total of 82 acres.<sup>17</sup> Table 4 below describes these spaces. The single largest privately owned public space at one acre is an elevated plaza located at 55 Water Street in Lower Manhattan. However, a 2000 study remarks that many of these spaces are maintained at less than adequate standards and that a lack of accountability exists in ensuring that the spaces remain open to the public.<sup>18</sup>

**Purely Private Facilities.** Another important element in the broader context for the DPR's mission is the existence of extensive private recreational facilities in the city. While there is only one private park remaining in the city, the two-acre Gramercy Park in Manhattan, many other private facilities serve park-like functions. For example, The Plaza at Rockefeller Center is private property that is made available to and enjoyed by the broader public. In addition, many private residential developments have spaces available exclusively to their tenants such as roof decks and gardens as well as exercise rooms and swimming pools. Private schools maintain areas in which their students can play or engage in sports. Finally, many recreational facilities are privately operated and charge for access such as private gyms and tennis courts. While none of these can or should fully substitute for public facilities, the existence of private alternatives in an increasingly affluent city does bear on the demand for municipally operated services.

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<sup>16</sup> Internal inventory of open spaces compiled by the Economic Development Corporation, December 2006.

<sup>17</sup> Jerold S. Kayden, New York City Department of City Planning and the Municipal Art Society of New York, *Privately Owned Public Space: The New York Experience*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc (New York: 2000), p. 44.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 40.

**Table 4**  
**Types of Privately Owned Public Space in New York City**

<u>Public Space</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Total Size (Acres)</u>	<u>Average Size (Acres)</u>
Arcade	88	6.88	0.08
Covered Pedestrian Space	15	3.05	0.20
Elevated Plaza	1	0.97	0.97
Open Air Concourse	1	0.13	0.13
Plaza	167	33.65	0.20
Residential Plaza	57	9.63	0.17
Sidewalk Widening	12	0.63	0.05
Through Block Arcade	9	1.25	0.14
Through Block Connection	8	0.63	0.08
Through Block Galleria	3	0.52	0.17
Urban Plaza	32	3.73	0.12
Other	110	21.21	0.19
<b>All Public Spaces</b>	<b>503</b>	<b>82.28</b>	<b>0.16</b>

Source: Jerold S. Kayden, New York City Department of City Planning, the Municipal Art Society of New York, *Privately Owned Public Spaces: The New York City Experience*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. (New York: 2000), p. 48.

**City Owned Properties Outside of New York City.** A final point to note is that the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) owns and runs the upstate reservoirs that supply water to City residents. The DEP allows recreational activities like hunting, fishing, and hiking on many of its properties. Maintenance of the recreational facilities is funded by the DEP. However, in a few cases athletic fields are leased to other municipalities, which bear the costs of maintenance. Of the roughly 1.3 million acres of DEP watershed in upstate New York, about 79,000 acres can be used for recreational purposes. Roughly 35,000 of those acres are underwater.<sup>19</sup>

## Planned Expansions and Enhancements

Growth in the city's network of parks is scheduled to continue. The expansion will result from four types of efforts – the PlaNYC 2030 initiative announced by Mayor Bloomberg in 2006, a long-term effort based in the City Planning Commission to enhance the city's waterfront by opening more of it to the public and providing more recreational facilities there, conversions of industrial areas to residential use including parks to serve the new housing, and a mix of often ad hoc projects identified by the DPR and public authorities to create new facilities.

<sup>19</sup> Inventory of DEP properties compiled by the New York City Department of Environmental Protection, December 2006.

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**PlaNYC 2030.** This is a major initiative to build and restore infrastructure that will adequately serve the additional one million people expected to reside in New York City by 2030. In December 2006 PlaNYC 2030 set ten goals that relate to better environmental conditions and improving various aspects of the City's infrastructure system, such as the housing stock, transportation system, and water network. One of the goals is to expand neighborhood park services.

In some public documents the standard established for adequate park facilities was that all city residents live within 10 minutes travel time to a park. In addition to the "10 minutes to a park" standard (which equals a quarter mile in most of the city and a half mile in the less dense areas of the city), the City examined other capacity criteria. One is to have 1.5 acres of parks per 1,000 neighborhood residents. Neighborhoods are defined as clusters of four to five census tracts. There are 188 such neighborhoods in New York City. As of 2000, 51 of these neighborhoods had less than 1.5 acres per 1,000 residents. Another standard is to have a playground for every 1,250 neighborhood children. Currently 97 neighborhoods do not meet that criterion.<sup>20</sup> However, PlaNYC lacks standards regarding adequate levels of usership of parks facilities.

In April 2007 Mayor Bloomberg announced 127 specific initiatives intended to meet the goals of PlaNYC 2030, many of which require the action of the City Council and the State Legislature. Seven of these involve DPR and are linked to the goal of creating adequate parks and open space.<sup>21</sup> These seven initiatives are described below and are summarized in Table 5.

- 1. Open schoolyards as public playgrounds.** The plan calls for 290 public school yards owned by the Department of Education (DOE) and not now open to the general public to be converted into public playgrounds operated by the DOE. Of these playgrounds, 69 are judged to need no new capital improvements in order to be converted; the remaining 221 will require new capital investments before conversion. These conversions are scheduled over a ten-year period at an estimated cost of \$111 million. The future annual maintenance costs for these new playgrounds is estimated at about \$3.5 million.
- 2. Improve underdeveloped parks.** The DPR identified eight parks it considers underdeveloped. These parks, which range from the 36-acre McCarren Park in Brooklyn to the 212-acre Soundview Park in the Bronx, will receive improvements such as new athletic fields, recreation centers, swimming pools, and in the case of Rockaway Beach in Queens, a new boardwalk. The estimated cost of the investments is \$386 million. Future maintenance expenses for these parks will be about \$4.2 million per year.
- 3. Convert asphalt sites into synthetic turf fields.** Many of DPR's recreation

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<sup>20</sup> City of New York, "PlaNYC: A Greener, Greater New York," April 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Another related initiative is a responsibility of the Department of Transportation. They are charged with identifying streets that could be converted to pedestrian-only public plazas. The DOT rather than DPR will be responsible for maintaining those plazas.

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sites are asphalt, suitable for sports like basketball and handball. To make these fields more attractive to participants of sports like soccer, field hockey, baseball, and rugby, the DPR will convert many asphalt sites into athletic fields with synthetic turf.

4. **Install lighting on athletic fields.** In order to increase utilization during evenings, the DPR will install lighting on 35 of its turf fields.
5. **Plant new street trees.** PlaNYC boldly calls for planting one million new street trees, but the pace is 23,000 trees annually. The budget over the next ten years is \$247 million for 230,000 trees.
6. **Reforest parklands.** The plan calls for the DPR to reforest 2,000 acres of parkland, yielding 250,000 to 300,000 new trees. The capital cost for this initiative will be nearly \$119 million.
7. **Expand the greenstreets program.** PlaNYC calls for creating 80 new greenstreet sites each year for the next ten years. The total capital cost for the 800 projects is estimated at \$15 million.

**Table 5**  
**PlaNYC 2030 Parks Initiatives Implementation Schedule**

<u>Initiative</u>	<u>Milestones</u>		<u>City Funding (dollars in millions)</u>	
	<u>2009</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>Capital (FY 2008-2017)</u>	<u>Operating (FY 08)</u>
Open schoolyards as public playgrounds	Open sites not requiring capital improvements	Open all school yards in priority neighborhoods	\$110.8	\$3.5
Complete eight underdeveloped destination parks	Complete community outreach and designs for all regional parks	Complete construction of all regional parks	386.4	4.2
Convert asphalt into multi-purpose fields	Complete development of all proposed multi-purpose fields	Maintain transformed fields for continued use	21.6	-
Install new lighting on existing turf fields	Complete installation of all proposed field lights		42.1	0.4
Fill every available street tree opportunity	Plant 23,000 street trees a year	Achieve 100% street tree stocking level	246.9	8.1
Reforest 2,000 acres of parkland	Begin reforestation	Complete reforestation by 2017	118.8	
Expand Greenstreets Program	Complete 400 greenstreets	Complete 800 greenstreets	15.0	0.6
<b>Total</b>			<b>\$1,075.9</b>	<b>\$16.8</b>

Source: City of New York, "PlaNYC: A Greener, Greater New York," April 2007.

**Waterfront Enhancements.** A long-term goal of city planners has been to make better use of New York's waterfront. This often involves converting land from industrial to park and

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residential use. Rezoning efforts led by the Department of City Planning and initiatives by other agencies have generated numerous proposals for creating parks on the waterfront. While the DPR has taken the lead in many instances, other active agencies include the Economic Development Corporation, the Brooklyn Bridge Park Development Corporation, and the Hudson River Park Trust.

Table 6 identifies 32 projects related explicitly to making better use of the waterfront. They are found in each borough and would add about 714 acres to the city's parkland. The projects are described separately in the Appendix.

A recent report by the Regional Plan Association has highlighted the need for better planning for the maintenance and operation of these new parks.<sup>22</sup> They estimate the recurring operating costs at \$135,000 per acre, suggesting a future need of about \$100 million annually. However, the revenue sources have not been identified and innovative arrangements will be necessary.

**New Residential Development.** Other expansions result from large economic development projects that include the creation of thousands of housing units. Plans for the Hudson Yards and Atlantic Yards include new parks among the new commercial and residential buildings. The High Line Park also is viewed as key to economic development in that neighborhood. Each of these expansion projects and their capital and maintenance plans are described briefly in the Appendix.

**Other Expansions.** The other projects identified in Table 6 are plans or proposals that have arisen in a variety of circumstances. The single largest project is the conversion of Fresh Kills, a former landfill run by the Department of Sanitation, into a 2,200-acre park. Similarly, the City was given a six-acre plot that housed a huge gas storage tank by Keyspan and is converting it into a park.

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<sup>22</sup> Robert Freudenberg and Robert Pirani, *On the Verge: Caring for New York City's Emerging Waterfront Parks and Public Spaces*, Regional Plan Association, June 2007.

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**Table 6**  
**Park Expansion Projects Discussed, Planned, or Under Construction in New York City, 2007**

<u>Park/Project</u>	<u>Borough</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Overseeing Entity</u>
<b>Waterfront Parks</b>		<b>682.2</b>	
Mariner's Marsh	Staten Island	107.0	DPR
Hudson River Park**	Manhattan	100.0	Hudson River Park Trust
Governor's Island	Manhattan	87.0	Governor's Island Preservation and Education Corporation
Brooklyn Bridge Park	Brooklyn	74.0	Brooklyn Bridge Park Development Corporation
Arverne By The Sea	Queens	53.0	DPR
Bronx River Greenway	Bronx	35.0	DPR/Bronx River Alliance
Riverside South	Manhattan	29.0	DPR
Ferry Point Park	Bronx	26.5	DPR
Bush Terminal	Brooklyn	23.0	EDC*
Harlem River Park	Manhattan	20.0	DPR
Southpoint Park	Manhattan	19.0	Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation
East River Waterfront	Manhattan	17.0	EDC*
Arverne East	Queens	15.5	DPR
Stapleton Waterfront Park and Esplanade	Staten Island	12.0	DPR
South Bronx Greenway	Bronx	11.7	Bronx River Alliance/Sustainable South Bronx
Fort Totten	Queens	11.0	DPR
Octagon Park	Manhattan	10.0	Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation
North Shore Waterfront Park	Staten Island	9.5	DPR
Barretto Point Park	Bronx	5.0	DPR
Piers 7-12	Brooklyn	4.5	EDC*
Pugsley Creek Park	Bronx	3.3	DPR
Castle Hill Esplanade	Bronx	3.0	DPR
Pier One	Staten Island	1.2	DPR
Harlem River-Regatta Park	Bronx	1.0	DPR
Melrose Commons Bronx River	Bronx	1.0	DPR
Silvercup West	Queens	1.0	DPR
Lighthouse - St. George	Staten Island	0.8	DPR
Battery Park City Teardrop Park	Manhattan	0.7	Battery Parks City Authority
West Harlem Piers	Manhattan	0.5	EDC*
United Nations Waterfront	Manhattan	NA	EDC*
<b>Economic and Residential Development Parks</b>		<b>96.0</b>	
Hudson Yards	Manhattan	20.0	Hudson Yards Infrastructure Corporation
Atlantic Yards	Brooklyn	7.0	Empire State Development Corporation
High Line Park	Manhattan	7.0	DPR
Greenpoint-Williamsburg	Brooklyn	50.0	DPR
Queens West	Queens	12.0	DPR
<b>Other Parks</b>		<b>2,608.4</b>	
Fresh Kills Park	Staten Island	2,200.0	DPR
Ferry Point Golf	Bronx	222.0	DPR
Highland Reservoir	Brooklyn	50.0	DPR
Sunnyside Yards	Queens	43.0	DPR
Fairview Park	Staten Island	42.0	DPR
Goodhue Site	Staten Island	35.0	DPR
Cresthaven Site	Queens	6.5	DPR
Elmhurst Gas Tanks	Queens	6.1	DPR
Yankees Stadium Project (net)	Bronx	3.8	DPR
Aqueduct Racetrack	Queens	NA	DPR
<b>Total Park Acreage</b>		<b>3,386.6</b>	

Source: New York City Department of Parks and Recreation; New York City Department of City Planning

Notes: \* These entities are developing the project, but then will convey the parks to the Department of Parks and Recreation. \*\*Hudson River Park comprises a total of 550 acres but roughly 100 of those acres are not underwater. Roughly a third of these land acres are already developed and are open to the public. These leaves roughly 66 land acres of parks to be developed.

## RESOURCE ALLOCATION PRACTICES

Creating and maintaining parks requires money. For the DPR's facilities these funds come from two basic sources – the taxpayers of the City of New York through its annual budget and private funds raised by nonprofit entities through philanthropy and operating revenues. This section examines each of these sources and considers some important issues raised by the efforts to mix public and private funds in support of the parks.

### City Funding for the DPR

Table 7 summarizes expenditures for DPR facilities in the most recent year for which data are available, fiscal year 2006. City funds totaled \$780 million, with private organizations adding an estimated \$65 million. The City is the major source of funds for the parks, accounting for fully 92 percent of the total.

The City's support comes in three forms.<sup>23</sup> First is the DPR's operating budget. Second is the DPR's share of centrally funded costs. These costs include fringe benefits and pension contributions for DPR employees; legal services and judgments and claims expenses for DPR-related litigation; and the debt service on general obligations bonds that fund DPR capital projects. These costs are reported in separate (non-DPR) categories in the City's operating budget. The third source is the capital budget. Capital expenditures are for relatively large projects that have a long useful life, and they are financed primarily by borrowing through the issuance of bonds.

In fiscal year 2006, the operating budget, at \$288 million, was the largest share of expenditures. The centrally funded costs attributable to the DPR totaled \$246 million. Debt service constituted \$119 million of those expenditures<sup>24</sup> and fringe benefits (mostly health insurance premiums) totaled \$88 million. Capital expenditures were \$246 million.

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<sup>23</sup> Additional support comes from services of other agencies such as trash collection and snow plowing by the DOS and security by the Police Department. These items are not included, and data relating to them are not available.

<sup>24</sup> Debt service includes payments both on interest and principal of general obligation bonds. This leads to a form of double counting of the principal when the operating and capital budgets are added together.

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Table 7  
Expenditures for Department of Parks and Recreation Facilities, Fiscal Year 2006  
(dollars in millions)

	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Percent</u>
<b>Operating Budget</b>	<b>\$288</b>	<b>34%</b>
Maintenance and Operations	237	28%
Executive Management and Administrative Services	31	4%
Design and Engineering	20	2%
Recreation Services	20	2%
Less Interfund Agreements (in Capital Budget)	(20)	-2%
<b>Centrally Allocated Costs</b>	<b>\$246</b>	<b>29%</b>
Fringe Benefits	88	10%
Pension Contributions	16	2%
Legal Services	5	1%
Judgments and Claims	18	2%
Debt Service	119	14%
<b>Capital Budget</b>	<b>\$246</b>	<b>29%</b>
<b>City Sub-Total</b>	<b>\$780</b>	<b>92%</b>
<b>Park Conservancy Programmatic Expenditures*</b>	<b>\$58</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>BIDs Park Related Expenditures</b>	<b>\$7</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$845</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: City of New York, Office of the Comptroller, *Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 2006*. Conservancy data is from IRS 990 forms for the most recently available fiscal year. BID data is from annual reports and audited financial statements, as reported to the New York City Department of Small Business Services.

Note: Debt service includes payments on principal which are also counted as capital expenditures. This leads to an inflated figure for total expenditures.

\*Parks conservancy expenditures excludes conservancies that support non-DPR parks. Central Park Conservancy expenditures are adjusted to subtract the support they receive from the City of New York.

Between fiscal year 1991 and 2006 the City increased its support for DPR facilities. (See Table 8.) In nominal dollars the growth was about 86 percent, from \$420 million to \$780 million. Growth was most rapid in the centrally allocated costs, notably fringe benefits, but was also substantial for the operating and capital budgets. Adjusted for inflation, the total growth is still a significant 23 percent. Further adjustment to take into account the expansion of facilities yields a constant dollar increase in capital and operating spending per acre of 13 percent from \$24,000 to \$27,000.



## Making the Most of Our Parks

**Table 8**  
**Department of Parks and Recreation Expenditures, Fiscal Years 1991 and 2006**  
(constant 2006 dollars in millions)

	<u>1991 (Nominal Dollars)</u>	<u>1991 (Real 2006 Dollars)</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>Percent Change (Nominal)</u>	<u>Percent Change (Real 2006 Dollars)</u>
<b>Operating Budget</b>	<b>\$184</b>	<b>\$277</b>	<b>\$288</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>Centrally Allocated Costs</b>	<b>\$104</b>	<b>\$156</b>	<b>\$246</b>	<b>137%</b>	<b>58%</b>
Pension Contributions	17	25	16	-6%	-37%
Fringe Benefits	24	36	88	267%	146%
Debt Service	57	85	119	109%	39%
Judgements and Claims and Legal Services	6	9	23	283%	151%
<b>Capital Expenditures</b>	<b>\$132</b>	<b>\$199</b>	<b>\$246</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>24%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$420</b>	<b>\$632</b>	<b>\$780</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>Park Acres</b>	26,292	26,292	28,840	10%	10%
<b>Expenditures per Acre (in Thousands)</b>	<b>\$16.0</b>	<b>\$24.0</b>	<b>\$27.0</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>13%</b>

Source: City of New York, Office of the Comptroller, *Comprehensive Annual Financial Report*, fiscal years 1991 and 2006 editions. 1991 park acres are from calculations of park acreage additions found in the *Mayor's Management Report*, fiscal years 1991-2006 editions.

Notes: Centrally allocated costs include fringe benefits, pension contributions, debt service, and legal fees. These costs for 1991 are estimated using proportions based on DPR's expenditures relative to the City's expenditures for these areas.

**Operating Budget Trends.** Table 9 shows the trend in the DPR's operating expenditures since fiscal year 1991. The agency suffered a staggering 21 percent cut in fiscal year 1992 and continued fiscal stringency through the mid-1990s. Significant increases came in subsequent years. The reported large increase in fiscal year 2002 reflects a shift in expenses for some job training program participants from the Human Resources Administration to DPR in that year, and the decline in fiscal year 2003 partly reflects changes in that program that reduced expenses charged to DPR. Most of the growth has been for maintenance and operations, and the slowest growth has been in funds for recreation services. Spending on design and engineering has increased relatively rapidly to support expansion in the capital program.

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Table 9  
Department of Parks and Recreation Operating Expenditures by Unit of Appropriation, Fiscal Years 1991 - 2008  
(dollars in millions)

	<u>1991</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>2001</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u> <u>(Forecast)</u>	<u>2008</u> <u>(Budget)</u>	<u>Avg. Annual</u> <u>Rate of Growth</u>
Maintenance and Operations	\$133	\$121	\$164	\$215	\$195	\$199	\$219	\$237	\$265	\$277	4.2%
Executive Management and Administrative Services	24	23	28	26	28	29	30	31	34	38	2.6%
Design and Engineering	11	12	16	16	16	18	19	20	26	30	5.7%
Recreation Services	16	8	11	14	16	16	19	20	22	22	1.7%
(Less Interfund Agreements)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(16)	(16)	(18)	(19)	(20)	(26)	(30)	
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$173</b>	<b>\$152</b>	<b>\$205</b>	<b>\$254</b>	<b>\$238</b>	<b>\$244</b>	<b>\$268</b>	<b>\$288</b>	<b>\$320</b>	<b>\$337</b>	<b>3.8%</b>

Source: City of New York, Office of the Comptroller, *Comprehensive Annual Financial Report*, fiscal years 1991-2006. 2007 data from City of New York, Office of Management and Budget, *Fiscal Year 2008 Adopted Budget*. Dollars are current (not adjusted for inflation).

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**Capital Budget Trends and Components.** The capital budget is used for investments in assets that cost at least \$35,000 and have a useful life of at least five years. Clear examples are the purchase of new park land and the construction of new facilities such as swimming pools or recreation centers. However, these minimum cost and duration standards are also met by many projects that are routine repairs and replacements. For example the replacement of a number of broken benches or length of damaged fencing can qualify as a capital project. Funds in the capital budget support a mix of expansion and enhancement projects and the more routine upkeep of existing facilities.

Table 10 shows the trends in DPR capital expenditures from fiscal year 1991 to 2006 in nominal and real terms. The capital budget was cut sharply in the early 1990s and then was restored to prior levels in subsequent years. In the most recent year, fiscal year 2006, DPR capital expenditures were higher than in any previous year in nominal and real terms.

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**Table 10**  
**Department of Parks and Recreation Capital Expenditures, Fiscal Years 1991-2006**  
**(dollars in millions)**

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Parks Expenditures (Nominal)</u>	<u>Parks Expenditures (Real)*</u>
1991	\$132	\$198
1992	95	138
1993	90	127
1994	84	115
1995	97	130
1996	86	112
1997	142	181
1998	157	198
1999	167	206
2000	196	234
2001	166	194
2002	212	241
2003	188	207
2004	196	210
2005	193	199
2006	246	246
<b>Avg Annual Rate of Growth</b>	<b>4.0%</b>	<b>1.4%</b>

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Source: City of New York, *Comprehensive Annual Financial Report of the Comptroller*, fiscal years 1991 through 2006.  
Constant dollar adjustments based on U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, All Urban Consumers, NY-NJ-CT-PA (CPI-U). <<http://data.bls.gov/PDQ/servlet/SurveyOutputServlet>>  
Notes: \*Constant dollars are fiscal year 2006 dollars.

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## Making the Most of Our Parks

A significant part of the DPR's enlarged capital budget is used for more routine repairs and replacements rather than major new facilities. This is evident in the large sums expended through lump sum appropriations. Examples of these lump sum budget items are "construction, reconstruction and improvements to tennis courts, citywide," and "miscellaneous parks, parkways, playgrounds and structures: construction, reconstruction and improvements, Brooklyn." These "projects" are allocated funds during the annual budget process, but they do not relate to specific facilities and have no target completion date; the money is assigned to specific projects within the category by DPR staff after approval of the capital budget.<sup>25</sup> For example, under the first appropriation described above, the DPR staff would decide which tennis courts to reconstruct or improve each year; similarly under the second appropriation listed above, they would decide what improvements to make in which facilities in Brooklyn.

The relative importance of lump sum appropriations in the capital budget is illustrated by an analysis of spending by the DPR during the first eight months of fiscal year 2007, the latest available data. In this period projects funded through lump sum appropriations accounted for \$57 million or 25 percent of the total capital commitments.

The use of capital funds is also influenced by additions to the budget by Council members and the Borough Presidents. The Borough Presidents are entitled by the City Charter to allocate 5 percent of the capital budget, and an important component of these discretionary allocations is typically park projects. Similarly, Council members add earmarked funds for specific projects after the DPR and Mayor recommend a capital budget. These added funds reflect borough and district specific priorities rather than citywide priorities, yet they often comprise a substantial portion of the capital budget. For example, in the first eight months of fiscal year 2007, the 17 projects earmarked by the City Council totaled \$21.6 million or 9 percent of the total expenditures during that period. The 35 projects funded by the five Borough Presidents totaled \$18.8 million or 8 percent of the \$231 million total. Together, funds from the City Council and Borough Presidents represented 17 percent of total capital expenditures during the first eight months of fiscal year 2007.<sup>26</sup>

**DPR Budget for Fiscal Years 2007 and 2008.** Forecasts for fiscal year 2007 and 2008 are that the DPR budget will grow substantially. In fiscal year 2007, the DPR is forecasted to spend \$320 million in operating expenditures, and in fiscal year 2008 this number is budgeted to grow to \$337 million.<sup>27</sup> These expenditures represent a 11 percent and 17 percent increase, respectively, over the actual figure for fiscal year 2006. The increase is

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<sup>25</sup> Capital spending through lump sum appropriations has been facilitated by the development of "requirements contracts" between the DPR and multiple vendors. These are contracts for a volume of work of a relatively standardized nature. For example, requirements contracts have been developed for installation of fences, replacement of benches and similar tasks and products. The specific projects selected within a lump sum appropriation, therefore, need not be subject to separate design and competitive bidding. The DPR can simply call on a vendor under the requirements contract to perform the work at a designated facility. Requirement contracts have the benefit of lowering cost and the time requirement for this work; however, they facilitate the practice of accelerating replacement work at the expense of preventive maintenance.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> City of New York, Office of Management and Budget, *Fiscal Year 2008 Adopted Budget*, April 2007. Expenditures are adjusted to subtract interfund agreements.

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primarily due to additional funding for parks maintenance and for initiatives outlined through PlaNYC. It includes 309 additional full-time positions for parks maintenance.

The capital budget is also expected to grow substantially. This is principally the result of PlaNYC initiatives. In fiscal year 2006, total capital commitments were \$279 million. In fiscal year 2007, the forecasted figure is \$745 million, and in fiscal year 2008 it is \$784 million.<sup>28</sup> However, capital commitment plans tend to be optimistic; actual capital expenditures are typically far less than the amount planned.

## Resources Outside of the City Budget

Two types of private entities provide resources to DPR parks – Business Improvement Districts (BID) and nonprofit organizations often referred to as conservancies. The arrangements differ for each type and among the conservancies, but both raise important issues about the long-term management of the parks system.

**Business Improvement Districts.** BIDS are entities that deliver specialized supplementary services—like sanitation, beautification, and security—to a discrete area of the City. These services are funded, in large part, by special assessments made on property owners within the district and are collected along with property taxes by the New York City Department of Finance. The assessments are involuntary to all property owners within the boundaries of the BID. However, there are periodic authorizations of BIDs, during which 50 percent of the commercial property owners must approve the BID.

There are currently 55 BIDs in New York City, ranging in scale from the \$23 million Downtown Alliance to the Myrtle Avenue Brooklyn BID, with a budget of roughly \$400,000.<sup>29</sup> These BIDs are governed by boards of directors made up of property owners in the district, along with elected officials who serve *ex-officio*. All BIDs are overseen by the New York City Department of Small Business Services.

Of the 55 BIDs, 12 provide park and landscaping services that might otherwise be a responsibility of the DPR. In fiscal year 2006, BIDs in New York City spent \$6.5 million on such expenses. As Table 11 shows, the Bryant Park Corporation constitutes the vast majority of the park-related BID expenditures, with roughly \$4.7 million. The 34th Street Partnership, a BID which, among other things, runs Herald and Greeley Square, spends roughly \$600,000 for park and landscaping services. The Lincoln Square BID works in partnership with the DPR to restore and maintain the Broadway Malls. In fiscal year 2006, they spent roughly \$140,000 towards this purpose. The Union Square Partnership also spent \$1.5 million in Union Square Park. They arranged for Wired Magazine to provide wireless internet access in the park and have worked in conjunction with the DPR to design capital improvements in the park.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Data is from annual reports submitted to the New York City Department of Small Business Services.

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Table 11  
Business Improvement Districts' Parks-Related Expenditures, Fiscal Year 2006  
(dollars in thousands)

<u>Business Improvement District</u>	<u>Parks Expense</u>	<u>Plantings/Street</u>		<u>Total</u>	<u>Parks Maintained (if any)</u>
		<u>Beautification Expense</u>			
Bryant Park Corporation*	\$4,693	-		\$4,693	Bryant Park
Union Square Partnership	1,500	-		1,500	Union Square Park
34th Street Partnership	254	334		588	Herald and Greeley Square
Columbus Amsterdam BID	-	5		5	
Columbus Avenue BID	-	30		30	
Fifth Avenue BID	-	30		30	
Fulton Mall Improvement Association	-	21		21	
Grand Central Partnership	-	957		957	
Lincoln Square BID	139	-		139	Broadway Malls
Lower East Side BID	-	14		14	
Montague Street District Management Association**	-	5		5	
Washington Heights BID	-	50		50	
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$6,586</b>	<b>\$1,445</b>		<b>\$8,031</b>	

Sources: Annual reports and audited financial statements, as reported to the New York City Department of Small Business Services.

Note: \*Bryant Park Corporation actually represents two entities, the non-profit Bryant Park Restoration Corporation and the BID Bryant Park Management Corporation. The entities are managed cooperatively and report their financial activity together in consolidated financial statements. \*\*Data for the Montague Street District Management Association is for fiscal year 2005.

Bryant Park is distinctive not only for the scale of its spending, but for the sources of funds and management practices. Bryant Park is jointly managed by two entities that act in close partnership and have the same executive director - Bryant Park Corporation, a nonprofit organization begun in the 1980s with a grant from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and Bryant Park Management Corporation, which is a BID. The Bryant Park Corporation, which manages Bryant Park under a memorandum of understanding and a lease with the DPR, receives property tax assessments via the BID (Bryant Park Management Corporation) and park usage fees, concessions, sponsorships, and rent from the restaurants in Bryant Park: Bryant Park Café, Bryant Park Grill, and 'wichcraft. The board of the Bryant Park Corporation provides no financial support; instead, they act in a manner similar to the board of a for-profit publicly owned corporation. Table 12 shows the trends in revenues for the Bryant Park Corporation. Park usage fees, mostly from corporate sponsors, have increased dramatically in recent years and at \$2.9 million, constitute the bulk of Bryant Park Corporation's revenue sources. These usage fees include "Fashion Week" and Citigroup's sponsorship of the free public skating rink in Bryant Park. Rent from restaurants also increased dramatically over the past ten years to \$1.3 million. While tax assessments were the leading source of revenue throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the assessments have remained flat over the past 10 years and now, at \$750,000, are only the third largest source of revenue.

## Making the Most of Our Parks

Table 12  
Bryant Park Revenues, Fiscal Years 1985 - 2006  
(dollars in thousands)

	1985	1990	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Park Usage Fees		-	\$247	\$952	\$1,204	\$2,046	\$1,630	\$1,723	\$1,993	\$2,881
Restaurant Rent	-	-	-	880	994	857	825	885	1,139	1,283
BID Assessments	-	523	850	950	950	950	750	750	750	950
Concessions	-	246	62	98	118	360	350	535	465	477
Government Support	-	250	250	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grants and Contributions	252	191	297	67	124	27	209	224	498	225
Other	93	64	18	90	116	134	43	112	69	69
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$345</b>	<b>\$1,274</b>	<b>\$1,725</b>	<b>\$3,038</b>	<b>\$3,507</b>	<b>\$4,374</b>	<b>\$3,807</b>	<b>\$4,229</b>	<b>\$4,914</b>	<b>\$5,885</b>

Source: Bryant Park Corporation.

**Nonprofit Conservancies.** One of the most noteworthy developments in park management over the past 20 years is the proliferation of nonprofit park organizations, conservancies and “friends of the park” groups. Currently 41 such park-specific nonprofits operate in New York City;<sup>30</sup> in addition, nine nonprofits provide some citywide park-related function. The two largest of these are the City Parks Foundation which spends over \$7 million to support activities in the parks and Trust for Public Land New York City Program, which spent \$7.95 million in fiscal year 2006 to build infrastructure in community gardens and to build playground equipment in schoolyards.

The park-specific conservancies spend a total of about \$80 million annually. (See Table 13.) However, not all of this money directly benefits parks. About \$17 million or 20 percent was spent on overhead, fundraising, and other non-programmatic activities. The Central Park Conservancy, for instance, spent \$4.4 million on fundraising in 2006, or 12 percent of its expenditures. The Battery Conservancy devoted fully 10 percent of its total expenditures to fundraising. The net amount devoted by conservancies to services in the parks is about \$63 million annually.

<sup>30</sup> Three of the conservancies identified have roles in New York City parks outside of the jurisdiction of the DPR - Battery Park City Parks Conservancy, Brooklyn Bridge Park Conservancy, and Friends of Hudson River Park.

## Making the Most of Our Parks

**Table 13**  
**Spending by Non-Profit Parks Organizations in New York City**  
(dollars in thousands)

<u>Organization</u>	<u>Year Founded</u>	<u>Program Spending</u>	<u>Total Spending</u>
Central Park Conservancy*	1981	\$24,960	\$32,784
<b>Other Park Conservancies</b>			
Asphalt Green	1972	\$9,350	\$11,251
Randall's Island Sports Foundation	1992	7,160	7,747
Prospect Park Alliance	1987	5,165	6,486
Battery Park City Parks Conservancy Corporation	1988	4,597	5,694
New York Restoration Project	1995	2,503	4,113
Friends of the High Line	1999	1,176	1,814
Madison Square Park Conservancy	2002	1,328	1,398
Battery Conservancy	1994	870	1,289
Riverside Park Fund	1986	939	1,136
Brooklyn Bridge Park Conservancy	1987	656	836
Fund for Park Avenue New York	1999	749	828
Bronx River Alliance	2001	727	802
Sustainable South Bronx	2001	626	690
Socrates Sculpture Park	1986	471	653
Friends of Hudson River Park	1999	509	619
Green Belt Conservancy	1989	263	596
Broadway Mall Maintenance Fund	1983	269	374
Friends of Alice Austen House, Inc.	1985	207	221
Friends of Van Cortlandt Park	1992	165	214
Forest Park Trust	1997	115	154
Carl Schurz Park Association	1974	100	145
Jefferson Garden Market	1974	121	131
Washington Square Park Council	2002	NA	103
Rev. Linnette C. Williamson Memorial Park Association, Inc.	1994	57	57
Friends of Blue Heron Park	1980	46	50
Friends of Washington Square Park	1985	29	45
Friends of Fort Tryon Park	1983	29	33
Friends of Morningside Park	1981	25	31
Fort Greene Park Conservancy	2001	17	29
West 181st Street Beautification Project	1986	NA	26
Eib's Pond Education Restoration Program	2003	21	22
East Village Parks Conservancy	1995	16	21
Gowanus Canoe Club/Gowanus Dredgers	1999	17	18
Friends of St. Catherines Park	1997	9	10
Astoria Residents Reclaiming Our World (ARROW)	1991	1	5
Flushing Meadows Corona Park Improvement Fund	1998	NA	5
Cobble Hill Association	1964	**	**
Sixth Street and Avenue B Community Garden	1982	**	**
Mariners Marsh Conservancy	1995	**	**
Flushing Meadows Corona Park Conservancy	2002	**	**
<b>Total Expenditures in Parks</b>		<b>\$63,294</b>	<b>\$80,429</b>
<b>Other Parks Related Non-Profits</b>			
The Trust for Public Land (New York City Program)	1978	NA	\$7,950
City Parks Foundation	1989	\$5,510	7,014
Council on the Environment of New York City (joint City/non-profit organization)	1970	2,435	2,973
New Yorkers for Parks	1908	1,114	1,412
Historic House Trust of New York City	1989	447	667
New York City Street Tree Consortium	1976	246	399
Green Guerillas	1973	312	368
Out2Play	2005	27	51
Turnaround Friends	1994	19	21
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>\$72,801</b>	<b>\$100,445</b>

Source: IRS 990 forms for each of the organizations, accessed through Guidestar.com. Expenditures are from the most recent fiscal year available, mostly fiscal years 2004 and 2005.

Note: \*Central Park Conservancy spending figures are adjusted to subtract the \$3.67 million they received from the City of New York in fiscal year 2005. \*\*Indicates that these organizations raised less than the \$25,000 threshold requiring them to file an IRS 990 form.

NA=Not Available.



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The largest and most well-known conservancy is the Central Park Conservancy (CPC). The CPC accounts for about \$32.8 million in spending, more than one-third of total spending by nonprofit parks organizations. Created in 1981 by Commissioner Gordon Davis and Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, the CPC is a philanthropic organization devoted to revitalizing Central Park. During the early 1980s, the CPC dedicated its efforts to designing and raising private funds for major capital improvements in the park. They also developed a master plan that outlined goals for the renovation and improvement of Central Park.

As the CPC finished more and more capital projects, they began to take responsibility for their maintenance. During the early 1990s, the DPR, facing a budget crisis, laid off many field workers in Central Park. To make up for this shortfall in staffing, the CPC hired workers to replace the vacancies, creating a situation in which more than half of field workers in Central Park were CPC employees. A 1993 memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the CPC and the DPR officially defined the working relationship between the two entities. The MOU confirmed the Central Park Administrator's dual role as president of the CPC and authorized that person to oversee both DPR and CPC workers in the day-to-day operations of the park.

In 1998, Commissioner Henry Stern signed a formal contract with CPC that continued CPC's role as the principal manager of Central Park, while maintaining the DPR's responsibility over policy decisions. The contract also created a maintenance of effort provision. Under the contract, DPR paid CPC \$1 million per year so long as CPC raised and spent \$5 million per year on parks programs. The \$1 million payment can be escalated up to \$2 million if the CPC raises and spends an additional \$2 million (for a total of \$7 million).

The contract also entitles CPC to a City payment linked to the net concession revenues earned in Central Park. CPC is given a payment equal to 50 percent of all revenues above a \$6 million baseline. (Activities in Central Park yielded roughly \$6 million in concession revenues in 1998.) However, the contract stipulated that the CPC can receive a maximum of \$2 million, regardless of how much concession revenue was earned. Combined with the payment agreements, CPC can receive up to \$4 million per year from DPR.

In April 2006, DPR renewed its contract with CPC for an eight-year period. The new contract enhanced the revenue sharing agreement with CPC by removing the \$2 million cap linked to the concession revenue. Now CPC receives 50 percent of all revenues earned above a \$6 million baseline, with no maximum limits. Importantly, the concession contract for Tavern on the Green is due to expire this year. It is very possible that a renegotiated contract will be much more lucrative to the City and the CPC.

The conservancies other than CPC vary widely in their expenditures. Seven other organizations spend at least \$1 million annually; selected characteristics of these nonprofits with spending above \$1 million are summarized in Table 15. In contrast at least seven of the conservancies spend less than \$50,000 annually.

The Battery Park City Parks Conservancy is distinctive in several ways. It serves parks owned by the Battery Park City Authority rather than DPR facilities. While legally a

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nonprofit entity, its board is almost identical to that of the Authority (all gubernatorial appointees), and it functions as a subsidiary of that quasi-public authority. Nearly all its revenues come from fees imposed by the Authority on property owners in Battery Park City; there is little philanthropy.

The other large conservancies each serve one or more DPR parks and have more independent boards. While in each case some public officials or Mayoral appointee serve on the board, the majority of the board members are private citizens selected for their commitment to the mission. Other common features are that the Parks Commissioner retains the right to approve permits for any special events in the park, the DPR provides liability protection for the organization for mishaps in the parks, and the DPR must approve all plans for capital improvements.

## Issues Related to Private Support for Public Parks

While the conservancies share several characteristics, they also differ in important ways in their relationship with municipal government. Experimentation and innovation ought to lead to some variation in these arrangements, but as the partnership approach has grown and matured it may be timely to seek more consistency. The DPR Commissioner retains responsibility for major policy decisions including the right to issue requests for proposals for concessions, to approve events, to set and enforce rules, and to approve all design and construction of capital projects. Nonetheless, variability arises around four important issues – incentives for philanthropy, the geographic concentration of philanthropy, treatment of concession revenues, and division of responsibilities between partners and the DPR.

**Incentives for Philanthropy.** Nonprofit partners are of value to the DPR and all taxpayers because they add resources, derived largely from donations, to the parks system. But potential donors (or in the case of BIDs, commercial property owners) understandably want their contributions to supplement, rather than substitute for, the public resources that are already spent in a park. For partnerships to work well the arrangements must include some understanding about the ongoing commitment of tax levy funds.

The most common approach to this issue is a “maintenance of effort” provision. That is, the partner seeking supplemental funding agrees to maintain some minimum level of public support. However, few parks partnerships have this feature, and those that do vary considerably. The CPC has a written agreement with the City, and it includes an annual \$2 million payment from the DPR conditioned on the CPC raising and spending at least \$7 million annually in private funds. In other cases the City commitment takes the form of in-kind support. For example, the Prospect Park Alliance and the Randall’s Island Sports Foundation receive overhead support and several DPR staff to supplement their staff in maintaining the parks. In a recently negotiated agreement with the Battery Conservancy, the DPR is required to maintain staffing levels in the park equal to fiscal year 2006 levels (four fixed full-time positions).

**Geographic Concentration of Philanthropy.** Donations generally are of two types. In some cases, wealthier people give to help poorer and less fortunate individuals.

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Contributions for homeless shelters, food kitchens and hurricane victims are clear examples. In other cases, people contribute to promote broad benefits for all of society – rich and poor. Donations for medical research and for wildlife preservation are examples.

At its best, philanthropic support for parks fits the second category. Facilities like Central Park, Bryant Park, and Madison Square Park benefit a wide range of users from all over the city and beyond. Preserving these parks is serving a broad public purpose. But contributions to park conservancies also represent a third type of philanthropy; the donors and their families are major beneficiaries of the organization's services. Examples are family donations to parent-teacher organizations at public and private schools; the funds are directed to supplementary services for the children of the donors.

A consequence of heavy reliance on this third type of philanthropy can be inequities in the level of services available to people in different service areas. When the service areas are neighborhoods characterized by different average income levels, this can translate into different levels of service for different income groups. The growth of nonprofit partnerships for the parks has led to some such inequities.

The more financially successful partnerships cluster in Manhattan and some of the wealthier neighborhoods in the other boroughs. These parks and their users are the primary beneficiaries of the partnerships. Table 14 shows the gross and per square foot of parkland private contribution revenue for the larger nonprofit conservancies. The per square foot revenues range from more than \$5 at Madison Square Park to 13 cents at Prospect Park, with the CPC raising more than \$1 per square foot. These amounts, which are intended as supplementary revenue, should be seen in the context of average per square foot spending of public funds by the DPR. If the baseline of public support is calculated based on total acreage and total DPR spending, then it is about 62 cents per square foot.<sup>31</sup> An alternative calculation, excluding all the parkland that is not developed or that is not maintained by the DPR, increases the figure to about \$1.72 per square foot.<sup>32</sup> Based on this range, the more successful conservancies are able to increase the resources available to their park relative to other areas of the city by between about 50 and 100 percent.

Table 14  
Gross and Per Square Foot Contribution Revenue of Select Non-Profit Parks Organizations

Organization	Private Contributions (Thousands)	Square Feet (Thousands)	Private Contribution Revenue per Square Foot
Central Park Conservancy	\$38,192	36,590	\$1.04
Randall's Island Sports Foundation	9,483	11,892	0.80
Prospect Park Alliance	3,049	22,923	0.13
Battery Conservancy	2,283	997	2.29
Riverside Park Fund	1,710	2,161	0.79
Madison Square Park Conservancy	1,401	272	5.16
Friends of Hudson River Park	818	4,356	0.19
Brooklyn Bridge Park Conservancy	566	351	1.61
Asphalt Green*	1,544	189	8.17

Sources: See Table 13.

Note: \*Asphalt Green is a recreation center located on a 4.35 acre plot of land owned by the DPR.

<sup>31</sup> The citywide estimate is based on total acreage of 29,025 (See Table 1) and total spending of \$780 million (See Table 7).

<sup>32</sup> The DPR estimates that 18,613 acres are not developed or are maintained by other organizations. Communicaton from Jack Linn, June 5, 2007.

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**Access to Concession Revenue.** The DPR gives private vendors the right to sell goods and services in its parks through legal contracts known as concessions. In exchange for this right, the vendors pay the City a fee, usually a percent of their gross revenue. Typically concessions are awarded based on competitive bids. Citywide policy for all departments, including the DPR, is that concession revenue is not dedicated for the agency's operations; instead it is deposited into the City's general fund and allocated through the budget process in the same manner as tax revenue.

However, nonprofit partners can have important effects on concession revenue generated in their parks. By making parks more attractive they may increase such revenue through greater use and volume. They also may have ideas for new or modified concessions that bring in more revenue. The DPR has recognized their partners' stakes in these revenues by developing a variety of arrangements that in some ways share them with the nonprofit organizations. However, there is no consistent policy.

One model used with the CPC retains the policy that all concession revenue is deposited in the City's general fund. The CPC does not hold or manage any of the concessions in the Central Park. However, the CPC has negotiated with the City to receive an annual payment equal to 50 percent of the annual concession revenues generated in the park over a \$6 million baseline. Under its 1998 contract with the City, the amount of concession-related payments to the CPC was capped at \$2 million annually. When the contract was renewed in 2006, this cap was lifted. The concession contract with Tavern on the Green, the highest grossing restaurant in the United States, is due to expire December 31, 2009, and it is expected by many that a renegotiated concession contract will push the concession-related payment to the CPC well above the old \$2 million cap.

A contrasting model was developed in the early 1980s with the Bryant Park Corporation (BPC). The BPC receives no payments from the DPR, but it was given the right to award concessions in the park and keep the revenues generated by these concessions. These revenues (including restaurant rent and park use fees) have become the dominant source of support for the organization. (Refer to Table 15.)

In other models the nonprofit partner has been given a concession by DPR, and it shares the revenues with the City. The Madison Square Park Conservancy holds the concession for the Shake Shack, a popular restaurant in Madison Square Park. It pays 8 percent of the gross revenues to the City's general fund, and the remainder is kept by the Madison Square Park Conservancy to support their activities. Similarly, the New York Restoration Project holds the concession on the New Leaf Café in Fort Tryon Park; it pays 10 percent of the gross revenues to the City, and the remainder is retained by the Restoration Project. The Prospect Park Alliance holds the concession for the boathouse and picnic house in Prospect Park; all revenues from these concessions are retained by the Alliance. The Randall's Island Sports Foundation keeps the revenue it earns operating Icahn Stadium and will share some of the revenue generated by a planned water park concession. In Asphalt Green, all user fees charged at the recreation center support Asphalt Green, Inc., the nonprofit organization that operates the site.

**Division of Responsibilities.** Many of the smaller conservancies serve primarily as advisors

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and fund raisers. The money they raise supports specific capital projects or programs within their park. Based on the history of the now larger organizations, as they mature they take on more responsibility for planning park renovations and enhancements and for aiding in the design of capital projects. Their role in funding the capital projects also grows. The CPC designs and funds capital projects in Central Park supplemented with city funds, and the Bryant Park Corporation funds and manages all capital investments in its park. The Prospect Park Alliance has a sole source contract to design and manage DPR-funded capital projects. These projects are sometimes supplemented with private money raised by the Alliance. The Battery Conservancy acts in a similar manner, raising money for design costs for projects that are funded by the DPR and State and federal sources.

The larger conservancies, including all listed in Table 15, have taken responsibility for day-to-day operations and maintenance in their park. However, they vary in the mix of DPR versus conservancy employees working in the park and in the way in which these employees are supervised. In some parks, like the Battery Park City Parks and Bryant Park, all workers (except Park Enforcement Patrol officers in Battery Park) are employed by the local group. In others, like Randall's Island, DPR employees work with employees of the conservancy to maintain its parks. In Madison Square Park the DPR provides about 5 full-time equivalent employees. The Madison Square Park Conservancy reimburses the City \$250,000 per year for this staff. Other workers in the park are employed by the Madison Square Park Conservancy. In Central Park most of the maintenance is done by CPC employees, but roughly 25 DPR employees and many more welfare-to-work workers also are assigned there. In the Asphalt Green recreation center, all employees on the site are employed and managed by Asphalt Green, Inc.

In cases where DPR and conservancy employees are working in the same park, issues of supervision and accountability may arise. To help deal with this issue, the DPR has developed a practice of designating one person as the Park Administrator. This individual has authority over all personnel in the park. The Administrator is usually also the chief executive of the relevant conservancy. Salary arrangements for the Administrator vary with compensation sometimes determined by the board of the relevant conservancy and costs shared between the DPR and the conservancy's private funds. However, in other organizations, such as the Bryant Park Corporation and the New York Restoration Project, the chief executive has no formal employment relationship with the DPR.

In addition, the nonprofit conservancies vary in terms of their legal relationship to the City. Out of the 33 park-specific nonprofits listed in Table 13, only 10 have contracts with DPR that formally articulate the responsibilities of the nonprofits in the park in which they operate.

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Table 15  
Summary of Private-Public Partnership Approaches in New York City Parks

	<u>Central Park Conservancy</u>	<u>Prospect Park Alliance</u>	<u>Randall's Island Sports Foundation</u>	<u>Bryant Park Corporation</u>	<u>The Battery Conservancy</u>	<u>New York Restoration Project</u>	<u>Battery Park City Parks Conservancy</u>	<u>Madison Square Parks Conservancy</u>	<u>Asphalt Green</u>
Concessions	DPR awards concessions. CPC receives a contract payment from the DPR equal to 50 percent of the concession revenues earned over a \$6 million baseline.	DPR awards concessions. The PPA is awarded some of the concessions, some from sole source contracts and others from competitive bidding process. PPA keeps revenues it earns in the concessions they operate	DPR awards concessions. RISF keeps revenues on Icahn Stadium and a portion of the revenues earned from the water park	BPC awards concessions and keeps all revenues earned on concessions inside Bryant Park	Battery Conservancy subleases concession contracts to vendors in several kiosks. BC receives 3% of gross revenues. In any year where the BC makes over \$280,000, the remainder of revenue is submitted to DPR	NYRP operates the New Leaf Café concession located in Fort Tyron Park. 10 percent of the gross profits go to the DPR; the remainder is retained by the NYRP	Battery Parks City Authority, not the BPCPC awards concessions, but the BPCPC is usually given a payment equal to the value of the concession. BPCPC does issue permits for events and collects revenue directly	MSPC subleases the concession on the Shake Shack, the largest grossing concession in the park. 6% of the gross revenues (and 3.5 % in later years) from the concession is submitted to the MSPC to support its activities in the park.	All fees earned by Asphalt Green goes to support their activities. In turn for nominal rent for operating the space, Asphalt Green must make a portion of their programs free to the public
Support from City	Receives no overhead support from DPR, but is allotted \$2 million per year so long as CPC raises and spends more than \$7 million per year in Central Park. This is in addition to the payment formula linked to concession revenues.	Receives overhead support from the DPR along with staff	Receives overhead support from the DPR along with staff	Receives no DPR funds nor staff	Receives no DPR operating fund but does receive in-kind support, such as free rent for buildings	Receives no DPR funds or staff	Receives no DPR funds or staff. Does receive "civic assessment fees" levied on Battery Park City property owners.	DPR provides 1.5 FTEs, varying numbers of JPT workers, Park Enforcement Patrol workers, and in-kind support such as plumbing, snowfencing, etc. MSPC reimburses DPR for an additional 1.5	Asphalt Green receives roughly \$750,000 in support from the DPR per year
Capital	Privately raises money for capital projects which are supplemented by City funds. CPC is responsible for design and construction.	Acts in a sole source contract to design and manage DPR-funded capital projects. Projects are sometimes supplemented with private resources raised by the PPA.	Raises private money for capital to supplement public dollars. RISF designs and manages capital projects.	All capital projects are privately funded, designed and constructed.	Design money for capital projects is financed by BC. Capital funds come from the City, State and Federal government.	Capital projects are privately funded, designed and constructed.	Capital projects are funded by the Battery Parks City Authority.	Raised \$3 million in private money which the City matched during the late 1990s. Capital improvements were designed by the Madison Square Conservancy.	Asphalt Green was created with private capital. Subsequent capital improvements (such as the pool) was partially funded by the DPR
Maintenance	Responsible for day-to-day operations in the park. Private workers work along side some DPR employees and JTP workers.	Responsible for day-to-day operations in the park. Private workers work along side some DPR employees and JTP workers.	Responsible for day-to-day operations in the park. Private workers work along side some DPR employees and JTP workers.	Solely responsible for day-to-day operations in the park	Responsible for day-to-day operations in the park. Private workers work along side some DPR employees and JTP workers.	Solely responsible for day-to-day operations in the park	Solely responsible for day-to-day operations in the park	Responsible for day-to-day operations in the park. Private workers work along side some DPR employees and JTP workers.	Responsible for all day-to-day operations of the facility
Governance	Large, majority private board with several Mayoral appointees, and the DPR Commissioner and Manhattan Borough President serving ex-officio. Privately funded president is also the DPR's Central Park Administrator	Large, majority private board with the DPR Commissioner, local City Council member and Brooklyn Borough President serving ex-officio. Privately funded president is also the DPR's Prospect Park Administrator	Large, majority private board with three Mayoral appointees, and the DPR Commissioner and Manhattan Borough President serving ex-officio. Privately funded president is also the DPR's Randall's Island Park Administrator	Jointly operating boards, one for the non-profit organization, and one for the BID. Board has representation from the Comptroller, the DPR Commissioner, the City Council Speaker, and the Manhattan Borough President	Private board, DPR commissioner, Manhattan Borough Commissioner, and council member serves ex-officio.	Private board, DPR commissioner serves ex-officio.	Eight member board, seven of which is the seven governor-appointed members of the Battery Parks City Authority. The eighth member, who chairs the board, is also a gubernatorial appointee.	Private board with the Manhattan Borough Commissioner serving ex-officio	Private board

## MANAGEMENT OF THE DPR

Good management of any organization, including the DPR, requires (a) meaningful information about its performance and productivity, and (b) capacity to deploy staff resources in a manner that maximizes the agency's performance. This section examines the ways in which the DPR seeks to meet these requirements. It finds that, despite significant recent improvements, the DPR lacks critical information needed for effective management and, therefore, cannot always deploy its staff in ways that enhance performance.

### Performance Measurement

Gauging the performance of an agency responsible for parks and recreations services is inherently difficult. The public wants the facilities to be easily accessible, safe, clean and in good physical condition. Agency leaders should be seeking to meet these expectations, and also seeking to minimize the cost of doing so. The challenge for parks managers is that the more they are successful in attracting the public, the more costly is the task of keeping facilities well maintained. Their productivity is best reflected in measures of the condition of facilities taking into account the intensity of their use. For example, it should cost more to keep a park that is heavily used in good condition than one which has very few visitors.

The leaders of the DPR have given priority to obtaining good indicators of the condition of their parks. They have done innovative work in designing and implementing such measures. However, less attention has been paid to taking into account the impact of utilization on these indicators and in relating the resources used to the resulting condition in the form of a productivity or unit-cost measure.

**Physical Conditions - Structural Problems.** A basic question about any physical asset is whether it is structurally sound - in what engineers term a "state of good repair." The City of New York addresses this question for many of its major assets in its annual Asset Information Management System Report (AIMS report). The report, produced by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), covers assets held by most agencies that are worth more than \$10 million and have useful lives longer than 10 years.

The latest (2007) AIMS report included 782 distinct assets of the DPR that met these criteria. Every year, one quarter of the covered assets are assessed; so the annual AIMS report reflects a rolling four-year average of the condition of the assets. The report indicates the cost of repairs, replacements, and maintenance necessary to bring those facilities to a state of good repair. The AIMS report also indicates the amounts the City has authorized for the needed repair. This figure reflects all funds authorized since the assessment (up to four years prior to the current report) as well as in the current year; recently authorized funds include amounts that are to be made available in a given four-year capital plan and may not actually be spent until several years in the future.

As Table 16 shows, the amount needed to bring major DPR assets to a state of good repair

## Making the Most of Our Parks

was \$394 million in the latest fiscal year. The figure was \$178 million in fiscal year 1997, with growth in nearly every year since. While rising construction costs may account for a good part of the increase, it also seems likely that more assets are in need of serious structural repair.

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**Table 16**  
**New York City Department of Parks and Recreation**  
**Funds Required and Authorized to Achieve State of Good Repair, Fiscal Years 1992 - 2007**  
(dollars in millions)

<u>Fiscal Years</u>	<u>Required Expenditures</u>	<u>Authorized Expenditures</u>	<u>Percent Authorized</u>
1992	\$225.7	NA	NA
1993	188.2	\$9.2	4.9%
1994	NA	NA	NA
1995	NA	NA	NA
1996	NA	NA	NA
1997	178.4	21.0	11.8%
1998	189.5	NA	NA
1999	221.8	24.9	11.2%
2000	226.9	25.0	11.0%
2001	280.1	29.7	10.6%
2002	343.0	46.3	13.5%
2003	348.5	36.2	10.4%
2004	312.0	29.8	9.5%
2005	346.8	32.1	9.2%
2006	378.5	28.0	7.4%
2007	\$393.8	\$43.6	11.1%

Source: City of New York, Office of Management and Budget, *Asset Information Management System (AIMS) Report* and *AIMS Agency Reconciliation Report*, fiscal years 2001-2006.

Note: The figures in the table are the sum of the needs in both the capital and the operating budget.

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In fiscal year 2007, the City funded only \$44 million or about 11 percent of the amount needed to bring all covered facilities to a state of good repair. This low proportion was the case for much of the recent past, partly accounting for the growing need.

The AIMS report also describes the funds needed to achieve a state of good repair by type of facility. As Table 17 shows, increased needs for bulkheads—the retaining walls that prevent flooding and erosion—almost entirely make up the \$206 million growth in recommended funds from fiscal year 1993 to 2007. The AIMS report also describes maintenance needs in terms of priority. A capital project’s importance for reaching a state of good repair is rated on an A to D scale; priority A projects are most immediately needed while priority D projects are less urgently needed. The share of projects ranked priority A increased from \$62 million in fiscal year 1993 (or 33 percent of the \$188 million total) to \$219 million in fiscal year 2007 (or 56 percent of the \$394 million total).



**Table 17**  
**Department of Parks and Recreation**  
**Funds Required to Achieve State of Good Repair by Asset Type,**  
**Fiscal Years 1993 and 2007**  
**(dollars in thousands)**

	<u>1993</u>	<u>2007</u>
Exterior Architecture	\$40,786	\$38,107
Interior Architecture	18,264	15,185
Electrical	2,603	2,782
Mechanical	5,102	4,896
Piers	1,488	5,963
Bulkheads	19,708	156,999
Parks' Walls	4,854	3,536
Parks' Boardwalks	18,799	17,742
Miscellaneous Buildings	16,673	27,142
Parks' Water and Sewer Utilities	30,952	54,952
Parks' Electrical Utilities	5,172	16,240
Parks' Streets and Roads	NAP	38,390
Park Bridges	1,613	3,893
Marina	NAP	7,908
Systems	22,250	NAP
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$188,264</b>	<b>\$393,735</b>
Priority A	62,043	219,324
Priority B	55,921	88,048
Priority C	31,481	20,988
Priority D	38,820	65,375
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$188,265</b>	<b>\$393,735</b>

Source: City of New York, Office of Management and Budget, *Asset Condition Maintenance Schedules for Major Portions of the City's Capital Plant*, fiscal year 1992 edition and *Asset Information Management System (AIMS) Report and AIMS Agency Reconciliation Report*, fiscal years 2006 editions.

Note: Figures are the sum of the needs from the four-year capital plan over the appropriate time frame and the needs from the expense budget from the first year of of the four-year capital plan.

NAP=Not applicable. These categories were not included in the calculations for each report.

## Making the Most of Our Parks

**Physical Conditions – Maintenance Needs.** While the OMB assesses the structural condition of assets, the DPR itself has long been concerned with the maintenance needs of their parks. Since the 1980s the DPR has conducted a Park Inspection Program (PIP) to obtain regular information about the condition of its facilities. The techniques have been improved over time, and it is now a sophisticated system.

Under PIP, parks are judged either “acceptable” or “unacceptable” on 17 different features. The features include lawns, benches, and playgrounds. Bathrooms and drinking fountains are not features inspected through PIP (but the DPR does track the share of comfort stations open and the share of drinking fountains operating). If at least 13 of the 17 features are considered acceptable, then the park as a whole is considered acceptable. PIP inspectors have held-hand electronic devices that update data on a real-time basis, allowing data to be used by district managers to respond to the needs of the parks for which they are responsible. In addition, the frequency and breadth of parks inspections have improved. In the 1990s, parks were inspected once every three months; now a rolling sample of 205 sites are inspected every two weeks. Each park in the DPR’s system is inspected one to three times per year.

Data from PIP is reported in the Mayor’s Management Report (MMR), online on the “My Neighborhood Statistics” website, and is used in the DPR’s management meetings called ParkStat Plus. During these sessions, district managers are reviewed by borough commissioners and senior staff regarding the condition of the parks for which they are responsible. The MMR includes additional data such as “trees planted,” “summonses issued,” and “capital projects completed.”

Table 18 summarizes trends in the condition of DPR parks based on the PIP data. The overall condition has improved markedly over the past 15 years; only 39 percent of parks inspected in 1994 were considered acceptable, 88 percent were deemed acceptable in 2006. The cleanliness of parks improved. Only 70 percent of parks were acceptably clean in 1992; 93 percent were considered clean 2006. A similar trend is evident in nearly all the features inspected in the PIP.

Since 2001 the PIP data presented in the MMR divides the inspected parks into two categories: large parks and small parks (including playgrounds, greenstreets, and sitting areas). Larger parks tend to receive lower ratings than small parks. In 2006, fully 89 percent of small parks were considered acceptable overall compared to 82 percent of large parks, and the respective acceptable cleanliness ratings were 94 percent and 89 percent. However, smaller parks did worse in ratings for play equipment and athletic fields.

# Making the Most of Our Parks

Table 18  
Performance Indicators for the Department of Parks and Recreation, Fiscal Years 1991 - 2006  
(percent of inspected parks considered acceptable)

	1991	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Citywide Acceptability Rating for the Overall Condition of Parks (Overall)	74	43	55	64	80	87	89	88	88	87	87	87	88
Small Parks, Playgrounds, Greenstreets, and Sitting Areas	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	88	90	89	88	89	89
Large Parks	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	70	80	79	81	79	82
Citywide Acceptability Rating for the Cleanliness of Parks	87	86	89	92	96	96	96	93	93	91	90	92	93
Small Parks, Playgrounds, Greenstreets, and Sitting Areas	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	93	94	92	91	94	94
Large Parks	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	79	89	84	86	85	89
<i>Custodial Maintenance</i>													
Litter (Overall)	NA	73	84	85	91	87	87	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Small Parks, Playgrounds, Greenstreets, and Sitting Areas	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	84	86	84	79	83	85
Large Parks	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	58	77	71	74	72	77
Glass (Overall)	NA	79	90	91	97	97	97	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Small Parks, Playgrounds, Greenstreets, and Sitting Areas	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	98	99	99	97	99	99
Large Parks	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	91	97	95	95	94	96
Graffiti (Overall)	NA	90	95	97	96	94	93	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Small Parks, Playgrounds, Greenstreets, and Sitting Areas	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	95	95	96	96	97	95
Large Parks	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	91	95	96	97	97	96
Weeds (Overall)	NA	83	88	92	95	97	98	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Small Parks, Playgrounds, Greenstreets, and Sitting Areas	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	96	97	98	96	96	97
Large Parks	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	85	91	94	95	93	93
<i>Structural Maintenance</i>													
Sidewalks (Overall)	NA	83	88	84	89	95	96	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Small Parks, Playgrounds, Greenstreets, and Sitting Areas	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	97	98	99	97	95	97
Large Parks	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	92	94	96	95	94	94
Pavement (Overall)	NA	71	76	72	81	90	85	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Small Parks, Playgrounds, Greenstreets, and Sitting Areas	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	90	93	94	94	92	89
Large Parks	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	78	88	87	91	89	86
Safety Surface (Overall)	NA	60	76	81	79	87	85	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Small Parks, Playgrounds, Greenstreets, and Sitting Areas	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	89	94	95	92	89	92
Large Parks	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	77	91	78	94	92	96
Play Equipment (Overall)	NA	43	58	68	85	88	86	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Small Parks, Playgrounds, Greenstreets, and Sitting Areas	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	86	85	91	95	89	87
Large Parks	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	95	94	97	98	98	96
Benches (Overall)	NA	72	85	84	91	94	96	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Small Parks, Playgrounds, Greenstreets, and Sitting Areas	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	95	97	96	93	95	91
Large Parks	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	90	91	92	91	92	89
Fences (Overall)	NA	76	83	85	90	94	95	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Small Parks, Playgrounds, Greenstreets, and Sitting Areas	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	94	92	94	92	93	94
Large Parks	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	89	90	92	94	95	94
<i>Horticultural Maintenance</i>													
Lawns (Overall)	NA	83	86	83	86	79	82	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Small Parks, Playgrounds, Greenstreets, and Sitting Areas	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	85	90	93	94	94	93
Large Parks	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	92	93	97	96	96	95
Trees (Overall)	NA	88	92	90	96	94	92	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Small Parks, Playgrounds, Greenstreets, and Sitting Areas	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	96	98	99	98	96	94
Large Parks	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	90	94	96	96	92	92
Athletic Fields (Overall)	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	63	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Small Parks, Playgrounds, Greenstreets, and Sitting Areas	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	89	87	98	89	90	75
Large Parks	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	94	93	100	90	91	90
Horticultural Areas (Overall)	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	93	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Small Parks, Playgrounds, Greenstreets, and Sitting Areas	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	94	98	98	98	98	98
Large Parks	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	98	99	100	100	99	100
Trails (Overall)	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	100	100	100	100	90	86
Small Parks, Playgrounds, Greenstreets, and Sitting Areas	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	92	98	97	100	98	98
Large Parks	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	96	95	100	100	100	100
Water Bodies (Overall)	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	96	95	100	100	100	100
Small Parks, Playgrounds, Greenstreets, and Sitting Areas	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	93	98	98	96	94	96
Large Parks	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	93	98	98	96	94	96

Source: City of New York, Mayor's Office of Operations, *Mayor's Management Report*, fiscal year 1994-2006 editions.  
Note: NA=Not available.

## Making the Most of Our Parks

Independent organizations have begun to assess conditions in DPR parks in order to provide additional information beyond that available through PIP. Beginning in 2003, New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P) issued *The Report Card on Parks*. It reports on their inspections of 190 neighborhood parks. The NY4P's study rates parks on a 1-100 scale based on the condition of eight park features: active recreation space (athletic fields and courts), passive greenspace, playgrounds, immediate environment, bathrooms, drinking fountains, sitting areas, sidewalks, streets, trails, and pathways. The NY4P results are presented on a park-by-park basis, by borough, and citywide.

Table 19 compares the findings from NY4P assessments to PIP indicators reported in the MMR. The MMR scores are an average of the acceptability ratings for small parks, playgrounds, greenstreets, and sitting areas on features similar to the ones examined in the NY4P study. (No MMR data are comparable to the immediate environment feature assessed by NY4P.) On a whole, the NY4P grades are much lower than those reported in the MMR. This is more a reflection of the differences in the methodologies of assessment than a disagreement about the quality of parks facilities. Despite the gap in scores, the grades both increased between 2003 and 2005. The exceptions are sitting areas, where the NY4P score decreased from 83 to 81, and pathways, sidewalks, and streets, where the score went from 83 to 86 between 2003 and 2004, but then fell to 82 in 2005.

The NY4P analysis by borough highlights some geographical inequities in park conditions. As Table 20 shows, parks in Brooklyn and the Bronx receive lower ratings than parks in Manhattan and Staten Island. Staten Island parks have the highest average score over the three year period (85.1) while parks in the Bronx have the lowest (72.2).

The NY4P reports also stressed that poor conditions tend to persist in the same parks. NY4P recently completed a report on the 10 best and 10 worst maintained parks, as rated in their 2005 *Report Card on Parks*. All of the 10 parks rated "F" in 2005 also received an "F" in 2006.

## Making the Most of Our Parks

**Table 19**  
**NY4P Report Card Results versus MMR Results, Fiscal Years 2003 - 2006**

	<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>
Bathrooms (Comfort Stations)				
NY4P (Scale)	48	52	74	NA
MMR* (Percent Open)	74	83	84	92
Drinking Fountains				
NY4P (Scale)	52	57	60	NA
MMR* (Percent Operating)	91	91	89	90
Active Recreation (Athletic Fields)				
NY4P (Scale)	66	72	74	NA
MMR (Percent Acceptable)	99	90	91	83
Sitting Areas (Benches)				
NY4P (Scale)	83	82	81	NA
MMR (Percent Acceptable)	92	93	94	90
Passive Recreation (Lawns, Trees, Horticultural Areas, and Water Bodies)				
NY4P (Scale)	70	80	83	NA
MMR (Percent Acceptable)	98	97	96	96
Pathways, Sidewalks, and Streets (Sidewalks, Pavement, and Paths)				
NY4P (Scale)	83	86	82	NA
MMR (Percent Acceptable)	96	96	93	92
Playgrounds (Playground Safety Surfaces and Playground Equipment)				
NY4P (Scale)	80	85	87	NA
MMR (Percent Acceptable)	93	94	90	90
Immediate Environment				
NY4P (Scale)	89	94	91	NA
MMR (Percent Acceptable)	NA	NA	NA	NA

Sources: New Yorkers for Parks, *The Report Card on Parks 2005*; City of New York, Mayor's Office of Operation, *Mayor's Management Report*, fiscal years 2003-2006 editions.

Notes: MMR ratings of comfort stations on drinking fountains only assess whether the facility is in service. MMR ratings reflect the percentage of parks that were considered acceptable for each of the features. The NY4P methodology grades each park on a 1-100 scale. NA = Not available.

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**Table 20**  
**New Yorkers for Parks Report Card Results by Borough, Fiscal Years 2003 - 2005**  
 (scale of 1 - 100)

<u>Borough</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>Three Year Average</u>
Bronx	67.0	74.4	75.1	72.2
Brooklyn	72.0	73.6	72.7	72.8
Manhattan	79.7	78.2	83.2	80.4
Queens	72.0	79.9	83.9	78.6
Staten Island	81.2	84.5	89.6	85.1

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Source: New Yorkers for Parks, *The Report Card on Parks 2005: An Independent Assessment of New York City's Neighborhood Parks*.

Note: The data is the mean score for all the parks surveyed in the study, categorized by borough.

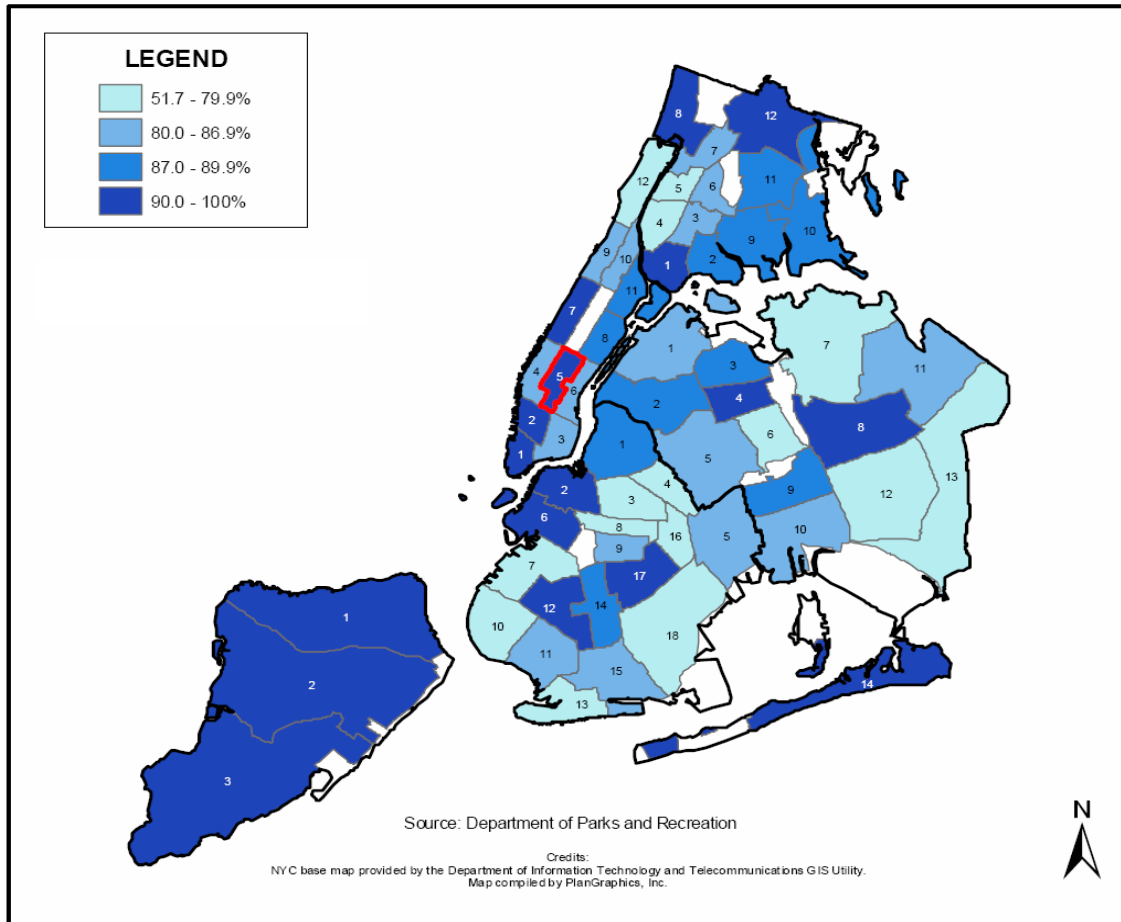
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Based on the borough data and anecdotal evidence, NY4P suggests that poorer neighborhoods may not be receiving as satisfactory service from DPR maintenance staff as wealthier ones. This hypothesis can be further tested with more detailed data available from the PIP program on the “My Neighborhood Statistics” website. Figure 1 is a map of New York City’s 59 community boards. The lighter shades indicate areas of the City with lower percentages of neighborhood parks with acceptable conditions; the darker shades indicate areas with higher portions of well-maintained parks. The initial impression for those familiar with the districts is that poorer areas fare less well. More sophisticated statistical analysis supports this impression. Table 21 summarizes a correlation analysis for the 59 districts among two measures of parks conditions - “percent of small and neighborhood parks rated acceptable for all conditions” and “percent of small and neighborhood parks rated acceptable for cleanliness” – and two measures of economic conditions – median household income and the percent of individuals living in poverty. The results confirm a statistically significant<sup>33</sup> (yet modest in magnitude) correlation between acceptable park conditions and median household income. A significant, yet slightly weaker, correlation exists between cleanliness in parks and median household income. Similarly, a significant negative correlation exists between acceptable park conditions and the percent of individuals living in poverty. A weaker negative correlation exists between park cleanliness and the percent of individuals living in poverty.

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<sup>33</sup> Significance is established at the 0.05 (95% confidence) level.

Figure 1  
Department of Parks and Recreation Small Parks and Playgrounds in Acceptable Condition by Community Board, Fiscal Year 2006  
(percent of parks)



## Making the Most of Our Parks

**Table 21**  
**Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Coefficient for Economic Indicators and Park Quality and Cleanliness in New York City**  
**Fiscal Year 2006**

### *Descriptive Statistics*

	<u>Citywide Average</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>	<u>High</u>	<u>Low</u>
Percent of Small and Neighborhood Parks Rated Acceptable for Conditions (2006)	85%	9%	100%	52%
Percent of Small and Neighborhood Parks Rated Acceptable for Cleanliness (2006)	93%	6%	100%	72%
Median Household Income (2002)	\$40,000	\$15,901	\$80,000	\$15,000
Percent of Individuals Living in Poverty (2000)	21%	12%	46%	5%

### *Correlation Analysis*

Pearson's R (1.0 = perfect positive correlation, -1.0 = perfect negative correlation)

	<u>Median Household Income (2002)</u>	<u>Percent of Individuals Living in Poverty (2000)</u>
Percent of Small and Neighborhood Parks Rated Acceptable for Conditions (2006)	**0.361	**-.0344
Percent of Small and Neighborhood Parks Rated Acceptable for Cleanliness (2007)	**0.261	*-0.229

Source: City of New York, Mayor's Office of Operations, My Statistics Website: <http://gis.nyc.gov/ops/mmr/address.jsp?app=MMR>. City of New York, Department of City Planning; and Citizen's Committee for Children, *Keeping Track of New York City's Children*, 2006.

Notes: \*\* Statistically significant at the .05 level. \* Statistically significant at the .1 level.

While PIP statistics indicate that inequities persist in park conditions, substantial progress has been made in closing the gap between parks in poor neighborhoods and parks in wealthier neighborhoods. In 1994 the percent of parks rated acceptable in districts below the median household income was 25 percent; in the districts above the median household income, this figure was 48 percent. In 2006 the percent of parks rated acceptable in districts below the median income improved to 81 percent; the wealthier districts improved to 85 percent.<sup>34</sup> Over the 12 year period the gap between the poorer and wealthier districts diminished from 23 percentage points to four percentage points; in the same period the correlation coefficient between percent of parks in acceptable condition and median household income dropped from .59 to .36.

**Safety in Parks.** Until recently information about crime in the parks was available for only one park – Central Park. The Police Department has established a separate precinct for Central Park and reports crime statistics for it; all other parks are within large precincts, and any crime in a park is reported together with all crimes in the precinct. In Central Park, the number of serious crimes dropped from 368 in 1990 to 270 in 1995 and from 182 in 2001 to 127 in 2006.<sup>35</sup>

The lack of attention to crime in parks was a concern for City Council members and park advocates. As a result, local legislation passed in December 2005 requires reports on crimes in each of the 20 largest parks. The latest report covered the period between June 2006 and

<sup>34</sup> New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. Agency analysis of PIP ratings as reported in the Mayor's Management Report, fiscal years 1994 and 2006 editions.

<sup>35</sup> New York City Police Department, Compstat Report for Central Park Precinct, May 2007 <http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/pdf/chfdept/cs022pct.pdf>



## Making the Most of Our Parks

March 2007.<sup>36</sup> The 20 parks list a total of 296 felony complaints; the park with the greatest number was Flushing Meadows with 114, followed by Prospect Park with 86.

**Shortcomings in Performance Measures.** While the DPR does a good job in assessing the conditions of its parks, these measures alone are inadequate for effective management. They should be supplemented by information on the intensity of use of the facilities and on the resources used at each facility or set of facilities. Without such data, it is impossible to objectively identify the most heavily used parks and allocate resources in a manner responsive to the intensity of park use. In addition, the DPR does not record or report unit-cost or efficiency measures. These measures assess the relationship between service levels and the resources dedicated to achieve these outputs. The lack of such a measure prevents DPR managers and the public from assessing how efficiently it delivers services.

The DPR does track use of some of its recreational facilities. Table 22 summarizes use of DPR skating rinks, pools, recreation centers, and tennis courts. Skating rinks are the most intensely used with over 700 visitors per rink per day they are open. Pools and recreation centers each have approximately 350 visitors per site per day. For the 565 tennis courts, about 21,500 permits were sold in 2006. Each permit allows the holder to play up to one hour per day between the months of April and November. This means there are potential waiting lists, because courts would be filled 38 hours per day (an impossibility) if all purchasers exercised their full privileges.

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<sup>36</sup> New York City Police Department. Data collected and analyzed by New Yorkers for Parks, January 2007.

## Making the Most of Our Parks

**Table 22**  
**Use of Selected Department of Parks and Recreation Facilities, Fiscal Years 2002 - 2006**

<u>Facility</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>
Skating Rinks (Number)	6	6	6	6	6
Attendance	710,000	720,000	522,716	698,094	662,648
Estimated Average Daily Attendance per Facility	789	800	581	776	736
Pools (Number)	63	63	63	63	63
Attendance	959,595	1,104,565	642,013	1,390,366	1,421,804
Estimated Average Daily Attendance per Facility	234	270	157	340	347
Recreation Centers (Number)	28	28	28	28	28
Attendance	3,460,636	3,492,217	3,741,077	3,358,602	2,934,000
Estimated Average Daily Attendance per Facility	412	416	445	400	349
Tennis Courts (Number)	570	563	565	565	565
Permits Sold	23,758	19,725	19,248	18,850	21,550

Source: City of New York, Mayor's Office of Operations, *Mayor's Management Report*, fiscal years 2002 - 2006 editions.

Notes: Assumptions for estimated daily attendance is 150 open days for six skating rinks, 65 open days for 63 pools, and 300 open days for 28 recreation centers.

An example of a City that tracks park usage is Minneapolis, Minnesota. In Minneapolis, annual park usage is estimated through counts in two-hour periods during the peak days of the summer. Entrances and times of parks surveyed are randomly chosen, with samples split evenly between weekends and weekdays. To adjust for unique variations in a given year, annual estimates are based on four-year averages. These estimates of park usage have allowed the City of Minneapolis to track the increase in park visitors since the statistics began to be collected in 1995.<sup>37</sup>

## Deployment of Human Resources

Maintaining parks and the related services are labor intensive activities. This makes effective deployment of staff and contract workers critical to enhanced performance. A review of the trends in the scale of such resources made available to the DPR and the way in which the agency uses them may suggest opportunities for improvement.

**Organizational Structure and Staff Distribution.** The DPR's organizational structure is the framework for its staff deployment. Figure 2 presents the organizational chart as of October 2006. The Commissioner, who is supported by a relatively small senior staff, divides responsibilities among four major branches, each headed by a Deputy Commissioner.

<sup>37</sup> Minnesota Metropolitan Council, *Annual Use Estimate of the Metropolitan Regional Parks System for 2005*, June 2006.

## Making the Most of Our Parks

The four Deputy Commissioners' responsibilities and subunits are described below:

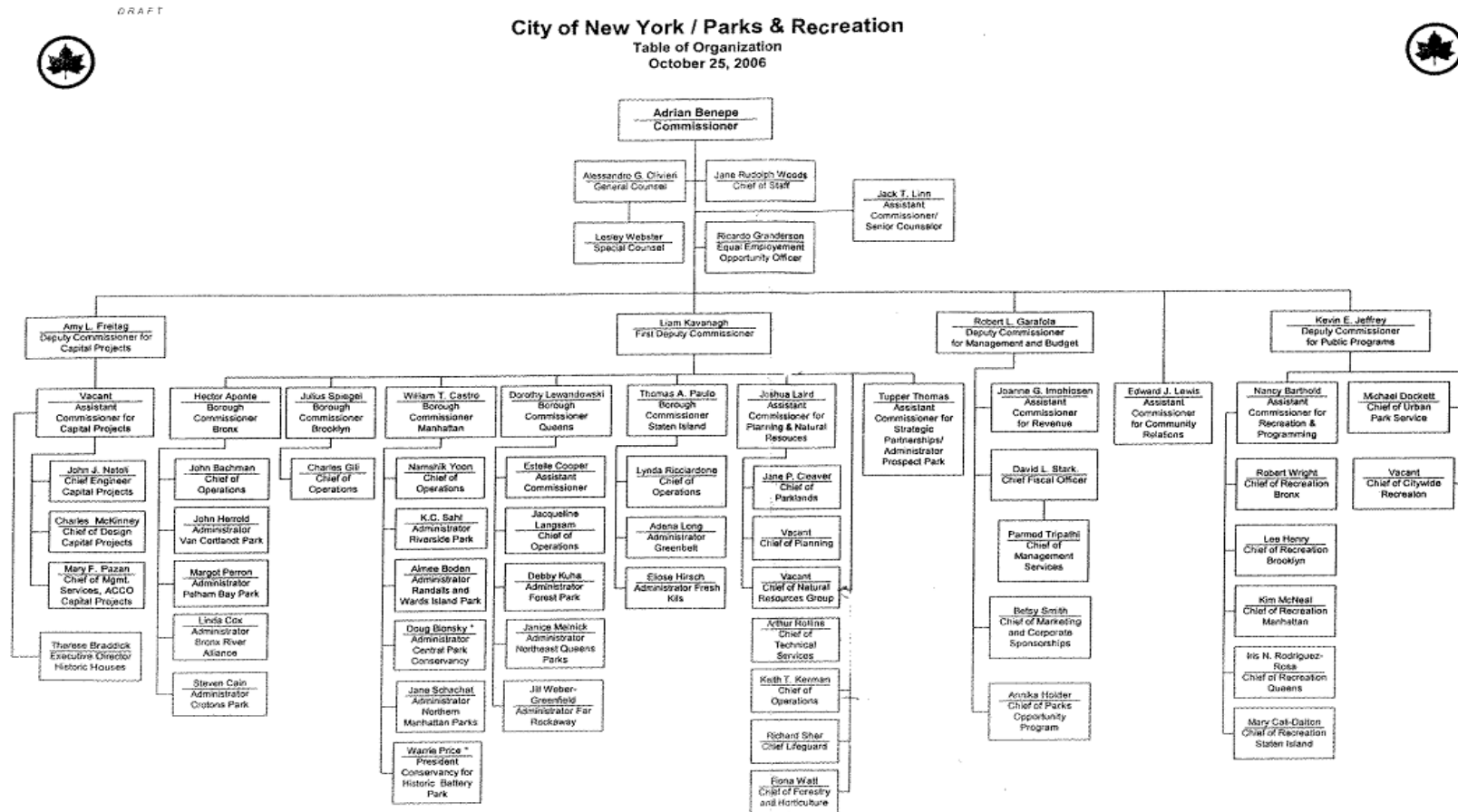
- **Deputy Commissioner for Capital Projects** – The Deputy Commissioner for Capital Projects is in charge of the design and construction of all capital projects. The historic houses are also under her jurisdiction.
- **Deputy Commissioner for Management and Budget** – The Deputy Commissioner for Management and Budget oversees the budget and management services for the DPR. His division also administers the Parks Opportunity Program (POP), a welfare-to-work program discussed below.
- **Deputy Commissioner for Public Programs** – The Deputy Commissioner for Public Programs oversees recreational services, the Parks Enforcement Patrol, and the Urban Park Rangers Service. The recreational services are organized by borough with a Chief of Recreation for each borough. The Urban Park Rangers, who provide educational programs and tours in parks and historic sites, are another subunit and are managed on a citywide basis. The Parks Enforcement Patrol enforce park rules and protect public safety in parks.
- **First Deputy Commissioner** – The First Deputy Commissioner oversees the maintenance and operations of the parks. Most activities and staff are organized by borough with a Borough Commissioner in charge of the parks in that borough. Within each borough, the parks are divided between those that have a distinct Parks Administrator and those that are grouped together by Community District. Each community district is supervised by a Park Supervisor. The Park Administrators and the Park Supervisors report to a Borough Commissioner.<sup>38</sup> Park Administrators have been designated for 18 parks, including six in Manhattan, two in Brooklyn, four in the Bronx, four in Queens, and two in Staten Island. As noted earlier, in some cases the Parks Administrator is also the chief executive of the relevant nonprofit partner agency. The Parks Supervisors have DPR staff assigned to either mobile teams that serve multiple facilities or fixed posts that serve a specific park.

The First Deputy Commissioner also oversees centralized park services, such as fleet maintenance, forestry and horticulture, and other technical services. These more specialized services are centralized to gain economies of scale and the deployment of these workers is done from the central office rather than the borough offices.

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<sup>38</sup> The Administrator of Prospect Park has also been designated an Assistant Commissioner with responsibility for guiding the development of the public-private partnership relationships.

Figure 2  
Organization Chart for the Department of Parks and Recreation



## Making the Most of Our Parks

The DPR employees have one of three different statuses. The core group is year-round full-time employees, with full-time status requiring at least 35 hours per week. A second group work on a seasonal basis, usually during peak summer periods, either full-time or part-time or work year-round on a part-time basis.<sup>39</sup> A third group is those in “workfare” programs and assigned to the DPR.

There are currently two workfare programs. In the Work Experience Program (WEP) the participants are receiving public assistance and must work three days per week in order to continue to qualify for benefits. They are assigned to the DPR by the City’s Human Resources Administration (HRA), the agency administering public assistance programs, and they continue in the assignment until they find alternative work or are disqualified for benefits for other reasons. The DPR was a primary job site used by the HRA for the WEP program, especially during the mid-1990s. In 1998 the number of WEP workers at DPR peaked at 7,550 and was 6,154 in 2000.<sup>40</sup>

Because WEP workers receive no compensation other than their welfare benefits, many welfare advocates criticized the program as exploiting public assistance recipients and union leaders feared the WEP workers might be displacing civil service jobs. In response to these concerns, the City Council in 2001 passed legislation creating the Parks Opportunity Program (POP).

POP hires individuals receiving public assistance for six months to perform a variety of jobs including maintenance, security, and clerical work. While being paid for their work, POP participants also receive training and educational services through the DPR’s Job Assistance Centers or Parks Career Training Program. The participants work at their DPR job site four days per week and spend the remaining time at one of these job training centers. They are supervised by park supervisors in the field but are overseen administratively and receive their supplementary job training services from DPR’s management and budget division. The compensation and length of employment for POP participants has undergone significant changes since the program was created in 2001.

At the start of the program in March 2001, the DPR began hiring 3,495 POP workers; at the same time the number of WEP workers dropped to less than 2,000. Wages for the POP workers ranged from \$9.38 to \$12.50 an hour based on job title, and they were treated as regular civil servants with the same fringe benefits. POP workers were treated as welfare recipients who obtained employment; their welfare cases were closed and they remained eligible for other benefits (food stamps, Medicaid, child care, and others). The POP workers also became public employee union members.

After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, POP hiring was suspended, and the tenure of

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<sup>39</sup> Also in this group is a unique (if not oxymoronic) job category of “year-round seasonal” employees. This category was devised in the 1990s for employees who would normally be considered core full-time employees. Creating this category allowed the DPR to report artificially low full-time headcount statistics publicly, which was advantageous politically during trying fiscal times. Recently, at the urging of the Office of Management and Budget, the DPR re-categorized about 1,200 of these year-round seasonal employees as full-time employees.

<sup>40</sup> City of New York, Mayor’s Office of Operation, *Fiscal Year 2000 Mayor’s Management Report*.

## Making the Most of Our Parks

current workers was extended to 11.5 months. Some additional hiring occurred between the Spring of 2002 and November 2002, but then hiring was suspended until April 2003.

The current version of POP began in April 2003. Participants were redefined from having civil service titles to a new title of Job Training Participant (JTP). Wages were reduced to \$7.50 an hour for those in all job functions. In 2005, 2006, and 2007, hourly wages for JTPs increased to \$8.00, \$8.16, and \$8.48, respectively. The program enrolls about 2,700 workers at a time, while WEP workers have dropped in number to about 200.

Because the DPR staff is a mix of full-time and seasonal workers, and because many staff are in a workfare programs, it is important to distinguish between “headcount” and “full-time equivalent” (FTE) workers. Headcount refers to the number of people at work at a given point in time. It counts all categories of workers equally, counting a part-time and seasonal worker the same as a full-time, year round worker. FTE adjusts for the number of hours a staff member actually works during the year. The City’s OMB has developed a methodology for converting other than full-time, full-year staff into FTEs. The method converts part-time and seasonal workers to FTEs based on the aggregate annual amounts paid to these types of workers divided by the annual amount they would earn if paid their average hourly wage for 35 hours per week. The method converts POP workers to FTEs by taking 80 percent of the annual average headcount (because they work four days per week). OMB does not convert WEP workers to FTEs, because they are not paid a wage. In the calculations below, the CBC has converted WEP workers to FTEs by taking 60 percent of their average headcount (because they work three days per week).

In converting staff resources to FTEs, it is relevant to consider overtime. To the extent an agency relies on overtime to meet staff needs, this should be taken into account. The OMB converts overtime to FTEs by dividing the amounts paid in overtime by the average annual salary in the agency. (Although overtime is often defined as 1.5 times average hourly wage, in DPR this does not apply to the hours between 35 and 37.5 weekly, and many higher salaried executives included in the calculation of the average annual wage are not eligible for overtime.)

In addition to its staff, the DPR has two other types of human resources available. First, several nonprofit partners hire people to work in the parks. As noted, the nonprofit agency chief executive may serve as a DPR Parks Administrator and supervise these private workers as well as DPR staff. Comprehensive data on the number of workers at each nonprofit partner are not available, but the CBC has estimated the total number based on the number at selected larger agencies and these agencies share of total expenditures among all partners.<sup>41</sup>

Second, the DPR contracts for some maintenance services. As will be discussed below, contracting-out practices have varied over the past 15 years. To the extent contractors have substituted for in-house staff (and vice versa), this should be reflected in a comprehensive assessment of staff resources. In the analysis below, this adjustment has not been made in

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<sup>41</sup> This calculation is based on the assumption that the Central Park Conservancy employs 220 people and that their annual expenditures is 40 percent of the total expenditures of all the nonprofit conservancies. Assuming that Central Park Conservancy’s share of the total nonprofit conservancy employees is also 40 percent, the total number of nonprofit conservancy employees is 550.

## Making the Most of Our Parks

the figures, but the notable changes in contracting-out are described.

**Staffing Trends.** Table 23 uses the FTE measure to show trends in the DPR's human resources since fiscal year 1991. In the early 1990s, a time of great fiscal stress in the city, the agency's resources were cut sharply. From fiscal year 1991 to 1995 total FTEs fell 18 percent. This was due to a 41 percent cut in full-time workers offset only partially by increased seasonal workers and growth in the WEP program. Expansion of the WEP program and strong use of the DPR as a placement site was a shift in policy from Mayor David Dinkins to Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, who took office in January 1994; the former had reduced the WEP program, and the latter quickly expanded it.

**Table 23**  
**Staffing Trends at the Department of Parks and Recreation, Fiscal Years 1991-2008**  
(full-time equivalents)

	1991	1995	2001	2002**	2003	2004	2005	2006	Forecast	
									2007	2008
Full-Time Employees	4,285	2,514	1,965	1,971	1,944	1,873	1,838	1,895	3,079	3,891
Seasonal and Part-Time Workers	1,197	1,331	2,501	2,249	2,123	2,219	2,493	2,602	1,779	1,571
POP Workers	-	-	-	2,386	1,911	1,902	2,140	2,269	2,269	2,405
WEP Workers*	580	1,075	1,608	1,064	641	432	167	80	80	80
Overtime	28	62	110	104	89	101	122	135	135	135
<b>Total Full-Time Equivalent Employees</b>	<b>6,090</b>	<b>4,982</b>	<b>6,184</b>	<b>7,774</b>	<b>6,708</b>	<b>6,527</b>	<b>6,760</b>	<b>6,981</b>	<b>7,342</b>	<b>8,082</b>

Sources: New York City Office of Management and Budget; Mayor's Office of Operations, *Mayor's Management Report*, fiscal years 1995-2006 editions. Fiscal year 2007 and 2008 figures from the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation.

Notes: The full-time equivalent conversion factor for POP workers is .8. The full-time equivalent conversion factor for WEP workers is .6. \*The figures for WEP workers for 1991 and 1995 are estimates based on the assumptions that the DPR's share of total WEP referees is six percent and that the referee to full-time equivalent conversion is .25. These assumptions are based on historical data from the 1997 Citizens Budget Commission paper, "The State of Municipal Services in the 1990s: Social Services in New York City."

\*\* The POP program was started in 2002 and many of the first participants were WEP workers. As a result, double counting is probable.

From fiscal year 1995 to 2001 human resources expanded sufficiently to bring the FTE count slightly above the 1991 level. This occurred despite a continued decline in the number of reported full-time employees. The loss was offset by continued expansion of the WEP program and growth in seasonal employees. However, to some extent, the growth in seasonal employees was a subterfuge by DPR managers; full-time, year round employees were categorized as seasonal workers to avoid the appearance of growth in full-time headcount – a politically sensitive number.

Between fiscal year 2001 and 2006 human resources expanded more modestly. The growth is due largely to creation of the POP program. WEP workers declined in number, but far less than the number of POP workers. Reported full-time workers continued to decline. However, total FTEs in fiscal year 2006 were just under 15 percent greater than fiscal year 1991. This rate of expansion is well above the growth (10 percent) in park acreage over the same period. (Refer to Table 8).

For fiscal years 2007 and 2008, DPR staff will grow considerably. In order to accommodate the investments in parks outlined in PlaNYC, the DPR is increasing its FTEs to 7,342 in fiscal year 2007 and 8,082 in fiscal year 2008. The FTE staffing in fiscal year 2008 will be 24 percent greater than in fiscal year 2004.

## Making the Most of Our Parks

**Staff Deployment.** How does the DPR use its human resources? This question cannot be answered using the FTE measure, because the DPR does not account for its staff in this way. Instead, the best available data relating to staff allocation are on a headcount basis.

Table 24 shows the distribution of workers among the major functional divisions.<sup>42</sup> The key point from the data is that the bulk of staff (76 percent) is assigned to borough operations involving parks maintenance and operations. This group reports through the Borough Commissioners to the First Deputy Commissioner.

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**Table 24**  
**Department of Parks and Recreation Staffing by Function, November 2006**  
**(full-time, year round seasonal, and POP and WEP employees)**

<u>Function</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent Distribution</u>
Management and Administration	635	10%
Capital Projects	259	4%
Public Programs	353	6%
Central Services	242	4%
Borough Operations	4,677	76%
Bronx	1,002	16%
Brooklyn	1,296	21%
Manhattan	1,161	19%
Queens	936	15%
Staten Island	282	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,166</b>	<b>100%</b>

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Source: New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

Notes: Management and Administration includes the payroll codes of executive management, management services, the Arsenal, Arsenal North, and Arsenal West. Capital projects include central capital projects and the various borough capital divisions. Public programs includes the urban park service and citywide aquatics. Central services include technical services, telecommunications, central forestry and horticulture, lifeguards, fleet operations, park academy and forestry training. The Queens borough operations include Shea Stadium and Flushing Meadows.

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Table 25 focuses on the workers assigned to borough operations. The data highlight two important issues: (1) Workfare (POP and WEP) participants are a majority of this field staff, and they raise management challenges. (2) Absent information on the intensity of use of facilities, it is difficult to make judgments about the equity and effectiveness of the geographic allocation of staff.

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<sup>42</sup> The headcount data include full-time, year round workers (including those classified as seasonal in Table 23) and POP and WEP workers. Excluded are true seasonal workers and overtime.



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Workfare participants differ from civil service workers in three notable ways. First, they have high turnover. While WEP workers can serve indefinitely, POP workers (the larger component) are limited to six months. The frequent turnover means more frequent orientation and training. Second, they have more limited work experience. This means they may require more intense work orientation and closer supervision.

The data in Table 25 indicate that in borough maintenance operations the DPR has 242 supervisory personnel overseeing 4,172 workers of whom 2,711 are POP and WEP workers, 1,061 are other DPR workers, and about 400 are nonprofit partner employees in the parks. This is a staff to supervisor ratio of about 17 to 1, with the workfare component being about 11 to 1.<sup>43</sup> These high ratios may make it harder to use the available staff most effectively.

Third, the workfare participants are not required to take assignments that require relatively long commutes. In general, they are assigned within their borough of residence. This may limit the ability of the DPR to deploy them efficiently.

Table 25 also provides three indicators that relate to the equity of the distribution of human resources among the boroughs. The ratio of staff to park acres shows a great disparity, with Manhattan having more than ten times the resources per acre than Staten Island. However, this measure does not take into account the intensity of use of the parks. If staff are measured relative to daytime population (the potential users of parks),<sup>44</sup> then the situation is quite different with Manhattan having a lower than average ratio and the disparity between the most favored borough (Bronx) and least favored (Queens) drops to less than two-to-one. Using a ratio that relates employees to a combined measure of acres and daytime population again alters the picture; Manhattan becomes the least favored borough, and the disparity between it and the most favored borough (Bronx) is about four-to-one.

These figures are presented only to illustrate a point, not as recommended management indicators. The basic point is that effective parks management requires improved measures of park use and a way of relating the intensity of use to the resources devoted to them. Staff allocations among Borough Commissioners and among park district supervisors should be guided by data on both the size and nature of their facilities and the frequency with which they are used.

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<sup>43</sup> The figures would be even higher if seasonal and part-time employees were included. Moreover, the figures do not include personnel under “other staff titles” in Table 25, some of whom are supervised by the 242 Principal Park Supervisors and Park Supervisors.

<sup>44</sup> Daytime population estimates are conducted by the US Census Bureau and are intended to capture the population of a county during normal business hours, Monday through Friday.  
[www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/daytime/daytimepop.html](http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/daytime/daytimepop.html)

## Making the Most of Our Parks

Table 25  
Department and Parks and Recreation Staffing by Borough, November 2006  
(maintenance and operations headcount)

<u>Position</u>	<u>Bronx</u>	<u>Brooklyn</u>	<u>Manhattan</u>	<u>Queens</u>	<u>Staten Island</u>	<u>Borough Total</u>
<b>Parks Maintenance Titles (Maximum Salary)</b>						
Principal Park Supervisor (\$58,775)	3	1	5	3	2	14
Park Supervisor (\$58,775)	47	58	54	56	13	228
Associate Park Service Worker (\$46,024)	65	82	68	80	24	319
City Park Worker (\$38,293)	115	104	145	107	43	514
POP and WEP Workers	651	845	630	496	89	2,711
<b>Recreation Titles</b>						
Recreation Director (\$45,917)	5	14	18	8	3	48
Recreation Supervisor (NA)	9	12	25	10	5	61
Recreation Specialist (NA)	8	19	20	15	17	79
<b>Other Staff Titles</b>						
Climber and Pruner (\$45,575)	7	19	5	36	7	74
Community Associate (\$45,447)	11	7	12	10	8	48
Clerical Associate (\$44,754)	8	16	18	12	4	58
Assistant Gardener (\$44,340)	10	13	13	6	9	51
Maintenance Worker (\$36,561)	3	15	14	9	4	45
Other	60	91	134	88	54	427
Estimated Non-Profit and BID Employees	-	50	350	-	-	400
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,002</b>	<b>1,346</b>	<b>1,511</b>	<b>936</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>5,077</b>
Park Acres	7,002	4,514	2,693	7,297	7,518	29,024
<b>Employees per 100 Park Acres</b>	<b>14.3</b>	<b>29.8</b>	<b>56.1</b>	<b>12.8</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>17.5</b>
Estimated Daytime Population (2000, figures in millions)	1.2	2.2	2.9	1.9	0.4	8.6
<b>Employees per Million Daytime Inhabitants</b>	<b>836.0</b>	<b>603.1</b>	<b>525.7</b>	<b>494.1</b>	<b>756.4</b>	<b>592.3</b>
Daytime Population per Park Acre	171.2	494.4	1,067.2	259.6	49.6	295.3
<b>Employees per Daytime Population per Park Acre</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>5.7</b>	

Source: City of New York, Department of Parks and Recreation, Full Time and Year Round Seasonal Headcount, November 3, 2006. Data for borough park acreage from the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. Data on estimated daytime population is from the United States Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/daytime/daytimepop.html>

**Contracting-out.** The need for staff in an agency is affected by the extent to which it contracts for services with outside vendors. In public agencies, competitive contracting is sometimes seen as a way to achieve lower unit costs than with exclusive reliance on civil service employees.

The DPR has had some success in using competitive contracting to improve productivity in fleet maintenance and parks maintenance. This experience builds on the DPR's practice in the 1980s of transferring operating responsibility for its public golf courses from in-house staff to private firms granted competitive concessions. In the mid-1990s, as part of a citywide effort to promote privatization under Mayor Giuliani, the DPR selected fleet maintenance as a service in which to test competitive contracting. The model was one in which the service would be contracted out in two boroughs (Bronx and Brooklyn) and results compared both before and after in those boroughs and with performance by in-house operations in the other boroughs. The results were highly positive.<sup>45</sup> Private contractors were able to reduce vehicle out-of-service rates while saving 38 percent in fleet maintenance

<sup>45</sup> E. S. Savas, *Privatization in the City: Successes, Failures, Lessons*, CQ Press, Washington, DC: 2005, pp 210-238.

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expenditures in the Bronx<sup>46</sup> and 30 percent in Brooklyn.<sup>47</sup> This led to a series of reforms in in-house maintenance practices. Facing competition from private contractors, the parks employees union agreed to management initiatives, including the regular monitoring and reporting of out-of-service rates, subcontracting preventative maintenance services to specialized garages, and centralizing the vehicle parts inventory. The in-house reforms helped the DPR lower its out-of-service rate from 14 percent in 1997 to 5.6 percent in 2001.<sup>48</sup>

The DPR's experience in contracting out park maintenance was not as positive. Following the fleet maintenance initiative, the DPR experimented with contracting out maintenance for selected parks in Queens and Brooklyn. However, only a few small local contractors entered the competitive bidding; informal feedback from larger national firms indicated they were reluctant to bid absent data on the intensity of use of the facilities that would drive the costs of maintenance. DPR staff worked with the selected contractor and savings of about 30 percent were eventually realized.<sup>49</sup> However, the contracting out was discontinued in 1997. The primary reason given for this decision was the increased availability of WEP workers. Since these workers required no wages, the cost (to DPR) was believed to be less than that for outside vendors. But the decision was not based on any formal analysis that considered the actual productivity of WEP workers and their possible need for greater supervision. Additional considerations in the decision to stop contracting out were union hostility and the associated political pressures.

Since dropping the parks maintenance contracts, the DPR has not given priority to competitive contracting initiatives. (See Table 26.) The share of the DPR's operating budget allocated to contracts rose from 2 percent in fiscal year 1992 to 12 percent in fiscal year 1999, but has fallen to between 6 and 8 percent in more recent years.

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Table 26  
Department of Parks and Recreation Contract Expenditures, Fiscal Years 1991-2006  
(dollars in millions)

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Value of Contracts (Budgeted)	\$8	\$3	\$8	\$12	\$12	\$15	\$10	\$16	\$22	\$22	\$22	\$24	\$15	\$15	\$23	\$24
Total Operating Expenses (Actual)	185	146	163	166	162	164	162	177	186	198	218	271	254	262	287	308
Contract Expenditures as a Share of Total Expenditures	4%	2%	5%	7%	7%	9%	6%	9%	12%	11%	10%	9%	6%	6%	8%	8%

Source: City of New York, Office of the Comptroller, *Comprehensive Annual Financial Report*, fiscal years 1991-2006; Office of Management and Budget, *Adopted Expense, Revenue, Contract Budget*, fiscal years 1991-2006.

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* p. 227.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* p. 228.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* p. 235.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* p. 308.

## EARNED REVENUES

Parks are a source of revenue. Activities in the parks generate revenue in several ways including fees for certain facilities and payments from vendors who are given concessions. This section identifies the sources and scale of current revenues for the DPR and then examines other models that suggest additional strategies for the DPR.

### Current Revenue Sources

In fiscal year 2006 the DPR generated about \$81 million in revenue. (See Table 27.) Since fiscal year 1991 revenues have grown about 6 percent annually in nominal dollars, and about 3 percent annually in constant dollars.

The largest source of revenue is concessions. These concessions include restaurants, parking lots, golf courses, street vendors and others. In fiscal year 2006 the concessions accounted for \$48.1 million or 59 percent of total DPR revenues. Since fiscal year 1991 concession revenues in constant dollars have followed the overall pattern of about 3 percent annual growth.

Permits and user fees totaled about \$8.8 million in fiscal year 2006. Permits are granted to individuals and organizations wanting to use a park for a specific event such as a corporate picnic or a wedding. These fees have remained relatively modest in total amount and have not grown in real terms in the last 15 years. User fees are charged at some facilities, notably recreation centers and tennis courts. They totaled \$5.1 million in fiscal year 2006 and are up markedly from the early 1990s. This is due less to greater use and more to a policy decision to increase fees. The City significantly increased fees in the wake of the fiscal troubles caused by the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. An Independent Budget Office study found that higher fees for tennis courts have resulted in a 16 percent increase in revenues, but a 40 percent decline in the use of these facilities.<sup>50</sup>

Another source of revenue is rentals, totaling \$5.8 million in fiscal year 2006. These funds come from boat docks and from Yankee and Shea Stadiums. As discussed earlier, the City's arrangements with these teams will change when the two clubs' new stadiums open in 2009. The DPR will no longer receive any revenue from the teams; rather, the teams will make payments to the New York City Industrial Development Authority.

The DPR also generates some revenue from private grants and public authorities. The DPR provides park enforcement patrol personnel in the Hudson River Park and Battery Park City Parks, both of which are overseen by non-City public authorities. These entities reimburse the DPR for the patrol services. These charges equaled about \$3.5 million in 2006. The DPR also receives a modest amount of categorical grants from New York State and the federal government.

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<sup>50</sup> City of New York, Independent Budget Office, "Fees at City Recreation Centers: More Pay, Fewer Play," March 2006.

## Making the Most of Our Parks

Table 27  
Department of Parks and Recreation Revenues, Selected Fiscal Years  
(dollars in millions)

	1991	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Average Annual Rate of Growth (Nominal Dollars)	Average Annual Rate of Growth (Real Dollars)
Concessions	\$21.5	\$23.1	\$38.6	\$40.2	\$40.2	\$45.1	\$45.3	\$46.8	\$48.1	5%	3%
Rentals (Docks and Stadia)	7.6	0.8	14.8	19.0	15.1	10.2	13.0	13.2	5.8	-2%	-4%
Permits	2.3	2.1	2.0	2.4	2.6	3.3	3.0	3.1	3.7	3%	0%
User Fees	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.6	2.0	3.8	3.6	4.7	5.1	18%	15%
Federal and State Grants	0.7	2.0	2.2	1.8	3.2	2.3	1.8	1.5	1.7	6%	3%
Authority and Nongovernmental Grants	0.1	2.0	4.8	6.3	6.4	6.9	8.5	12.8	14.4	20%	15%
Other	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1	8.4	0.0	0.0	0.2	2.1	17%	14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$32.7</b>	<b>\$30.1</b>	<b>\$62.7</b>	<b>\$70.4</b>	<b>\$77.7</b>	<b>\$71.7</b>	<b>\$75.2</b>	<b>\$82.4</b>	<b>\$81.0</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>3%</b>

Source: City of New York, Office of the Comptroller, *Comprehensive Annual Financial Report*, fiscal years 1991-2006 editions.  
Notes: Annual rate of growth is adjusted for inflation using fiscal year 2006 dollars as the index.

Table 28 shows that the DPR's earned revenues (total revenues net of the governmental and non-governmental grants) are concentrated in a relatively small number of parks. Of the \$64.9 million in earned revenues in fiscal year 2006, \$40.7 million or 63 percent was generated in 12 parks. Central Park, with several profitable concessions including Tavern on the Green, generates the most revenue, \$10.1 million. Flushing Meadow, with both Shea Stadium and the national tennis center, generated about \$9.7 million. Yankee Stadium and adjacent Mullaly Park generated \$6.5 million. Parks with golf courses, such as Clearview Park and Douglaston Park, also generate a significant share of the revenues.

Table 28  
Department of Parks and Recreation Revenues by Park, Fiscal Year 2006  
(dollars in millions)

<u>Park</u>	<u>Borough</u>	<u>Earnings</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
Central Park	Manhattan	\$10.1	16%
Flushing Meadows Park	Queens	9.7	15%
Mullaly Park & Yankee Stadium	Bronx	6.5	10%
Battery Park	Manhattan	3.6	6%
Pelham Bay Park	Bronx	2.5	4%
Union Square Park	Manhattan	1.8	3%
Clearview Park	Queens	1.4	2%
Riverside Park	Manhattan	1.4	2%
Alley Pond Park	Queens	1.2	2%
Douglaston Park	Queens	0.9	1%
Randall's Island Park	Manhattan	0.8	1%
Queensboro Oval	Manhattan	0.7	1%
<b>Subtotal of Top 12 Locations</b>		<b>\$40.7</b>	<b>63%</b>
<b>Total Revenue (Earned)</b>		<b>\$64.9</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: New York City Department of Parks and Recreation.

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Table 29 identifies the main sources of concession revenues. Restaurants yielded over \$8 million in fiscal year 2006 and represented the single largest source (17 percent). The \$7 million earned through golf courses comprised 15 percent. Push carts, which include hot dog and ice cream vendors, yielded over \$5 million or 11 percent of the total. Revenues from the parking lots at Yankee and Shea Stadiums provided over \$8 million.

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**Table 29**  
**Department of Parks and Recreation Concession Revenue Source, Fiscal Year 2006**  
**(dollars in thousands)**

<u>Source</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
Restaurants	\$8,135	17%
Golf Courses	7,045	15%
Push Carts	5,132	11%
Yankee Stadium Parking	4,075	8%
Shea Stadium Parking	4,065	8%
Indoor Tennis	3,426	7%
Driving Ranges	1,820	4%
Other	14,402	30%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$48,100</b>	<b>100%</b>

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Source: New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

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**Revenue Options.** The DPR's \$81 million in annual earned revenues is substantial. But a key question is whether it might be larger. Two factors appear to be limiting the sum – loss of some revenue to partner conservancies and limited incentives to DPR given the City policy of putting all earned revenue in the general fund.

As described earlier, in a few cases the DPR's nonprofit partners have been given a right to retain concession revenues rather than having the money paid to the City. This includes arrangements with the Prospect Park Alliance, the Bryant Park Corporation, and the Randalls Island Sports Foundation. Also, the CPC receives a payment from the City based on the amount of concession revenue generated in the park. These arrangements insure that the funds are dedicated to park uses, but also indirectly contribute to providing these facilities with more favorable access to resources than other parks.

Perhaps more important in limiting DPR's concession revenue is the City's policy of retaining all such revenue for the general fund. There are good arguments for this policy. Revenues generated by the DPR are public dollars and arguably should be appropriated through the City's regular budget process and allocated in accord with broader political priorities.

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However, there is a stronger case for allowing the DPR to keep some of its earned revenues for park purposes. Because the DPR's operating budget is not tied to its earned revenues, it has little incentive (outside of pressure from OMB) to increase these revenues. If the DPR were allowed to keep a substantial share of newly earned revenues, then it would have a powerful incentive to increase those revenues.

Such incentives have been made available on a limited basis in years when the DPR has been obliged to help balance current and future citywide budget gaps through OMB's requests for agency "programs to eliminate the gap," or PEGs. The OMB sets targets for agencies' contributions to reducing the projected budget gaps. Agencies can meet their targets by cutting expenditures or raising new revenues. Although the incremental revenues are not retained directly by the DPR, they are credited to the agency as an alternative to expenditure cuts. For example, the PEG of January 2001, required DPR to save \$6.8 million; fully \$6.1 million or 90 percent was met through revenue actions. This included \$3.5 million from additional rent revenue from Yankee and Shea Stadiums, and \$2.5 million from additional concession revenues. Similarly, the PEG of January 2002, required \$9.2 million from DPR, and \$6.4 million or 70 percent was achieved through additional revenues.

Two examples of parks organizations that are empowered to retain earned revenues provide additional evidence of the power of this incentive. One is the Chicago Parks District (CPD). The CPD was created by State legislation in 1934, merging 22 previous park districts in the city. The CPD is governed by a board of seven Park Commissioners, all of whom are appointed by the Mayor of Chicago. However, the District, which is not a component unit of either the City of Chicago or the State of Illinois, does not receive annual appropriations from either the City or the State. Instead, it supports itself through its own revenue generating activities and from a supplementary property tax levied on property owners in the park district.

Table 30 shows the CPD's revenue sources. The largest portion (74 percent) comes from the property tax levy. Like the DPR, the CPD also earns revenues through concessions, rentals of docks and sports stadiums, permits for events, and user fees. Unlike the DPR, the CPD owns parking garages and sells the rights to operate them to private concessionaires. The CPD's earned revenues (revenues net of taxes, donations and private grants) equaled \$91.8 million or 23 percent of its \$391.1 million<sup>51</sup> total expenditures for 2006. In contrast, the \$65 million the DPR earned on similar activities is only 12 percent of its \$554 total expenditures for 2006.<sup>52</sup> Although the CPD's ability to generate a greater portion of its revenues relative to its expenditures may be due to multiple factors, the incentives inherent in the CPD's independent financial structure can reasonably be credited for some of CPD's success in generating revenues relative to the DPR.

These structural incentives have led the CPD management to be highly innovative in their concession practices. One example is its policy to encourage the expansion of high quality

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<sup>51</sup> This figure includes fringe benefits, pension contributions, judgments, insurance, and debt service payments.

<sup>52</sup> This figure includes the centrally allocated costs of fringe benefits, pension contributions, legal services, judgments and claims, and debt service payments.

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concessions in less affluent neighborhoods by negotiating with concessionaires in high profile parks to also provide concessions in lower profile areas of the City. This practice performs the dual role of maximizing concession revenue opportunities for the CPD as well as encouraging attractive concession services in the parks of poorer neighborhoods. Another innovation is its initiative to work with concessionaires in the design of capital improvements in order to make park areas more attractive for retailers. The CPD also treats their concessions as a retail portfolio encompassing much more than hot dogs and ice cream, contracting with concessionaires to provide products like sunglasses and beach chairs.

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**Table 30**  
**Chicago Park District Revenue by Source, Fiscal Year 2006**  
**(dollars in millions)**

	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
Concessions	\$24.4	6%
Rentals (Harbor and Soldier Field)	42.6	11%
Permits	2.5	1%
User Fees	11.7	3%
Taxes	290.3	74%
Donations and Private Grants	9.0	2%
Other	10.6	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$391.1</b>	<b>100%</b>

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Source: Chicago Park District, *2007 Budget Summary*.

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A second illustrative example of the power of the incentive to retain earnings is the Bryant Park Corporation. As described earlier, it has the right to award and manage concessions in its park. The results, summarized earlier in Table 12, are informative. Its earned revenues vastly exceed the property tax payments raised by the associated BID; it literally runs the park as a business generating operating surpluses.



## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The DPR has a record of significant achievements since the stressful period of the early 1990s. It has increased the size of the municipal park system by 3,967 acres or about 14 percent; the recreational facilities within the parks have also expanded; new partnerships with nonprofit entities have been established and previous ones enhanced to make greater use of these philanthropic organizations; the share of parks in acceptable condition has been increased, especially in poorer neighborhoods; the Parks Inspection Program has been improved to serve as a useful management tool; and a new program has been developed in cooperation with the Human Resources Administration that both provides a valuable workforce to DPR and helps former public assistance recipients gain private employment.

But important challenges remain, and new ones have arisen. If New Yorkers are to make the most of their parks, the DPR must address six issues that emerge from the previous sections:

- *Greater incentives are needed to pursue earned revenues, primarily from concessions.*
- *No comprehensive, strategic plan guides expansion of the parks network.*
- *All parks are not kept in acceptable condition, and parks in poorer neighborhoods are more likely to be in worse condition than parks in wealthier neighborhoods.*
- *The DPR has no objective measures of park use and the efficiency of delivering park services.*
- *Borrowed funds are used for routine repairs and replacements, creating incentives to limit preventive maintenance and to replace equipment and facilities more rapidly than might otherwise be necessary.*
- *The multiple arrangements with nonprofit partner organizations that help manage the parks have not been made fully transparent and have not been established in accord with consistent guidelines for how to encourage philanthropy, how to divide responsibilities between DPR and its partners, and how to divide concession revenues between the City and its partners.*

Six strategies are recommended to address these issues.

**1. Create a stronger incentive for increasing concessions and other earned revenues by dividing growth in these revenues between the City's general fund and a new fund dedicated to parks improvements.** This should be a source of substantial new revenue for bringing all parks into acceptable condition and adding to parks facilities and programs.

The DPR should pursue additional earned revenues from events, concessions, and user fees. The parks already generate about \$48 million from these sources. However, this money is not dedicated to the DPR; instead it is retained in the City's general fund. The DPR budget neither rises nor falls based on the amount of revenue generated in the parks. This provides some financial security to the DPR and considerable discretion over the use of funds to the City's budget officials. But there is an important downside to this arrangement. DPR officials have little incentive to initiate efforts to enhance earned revenues.

In order to create stronger incentives for DPR to pursue these revenue opportunities, the City should allow DPR to retain a significant share – at last half – of its additional earned

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revenues. Opportunities for advertising, expanded concession services and event rentals are plentiful in the City's park system; creativity in taking advantage of these opportunities should be encouraged. For example, the DPR currently houses about 152 administrative employees at its headquarters in the Arsenal, an architecturally distinctive building located in a beautiful section of Central Park proximate to the high-end hotels on Fifth Avenue. It could be an attractive location for weddings, balls and other similar events, generating far more in revenue for the DPR as a concession than the cost of a lease for less distinctive but more functional space in an outer borough office building. Now the DPR has no incentive to make this change.

It is also likely that under a revenue sharing arrangement the DPR would be more aggressive in raising fees to use its facilities. However, some special caution is needed in this area. The recent experience of higher fees for use of recreation centers did cause a modest decline in use. Leveraging opportunities for revenues should be done in a manner consistent with the mission of the DPR to provide a park system with accessible, open public spaces and programs.

**2. Institutionalize responsibility for strategic planning for parks.** An entity within municipal government and with a clear mandate from City Hall should be engaged in ongoing planning for parks and the coordination of municipal and other park facilities.

Prior to release of the PlaNYC 2030 initiative in the spring of 2007, the City had no long-run plan for its park system. Park facilities had been expanded in pursuit of related goals such as the development of the waterfront and the conversion of undesirable land uses such as closed landfills and brownfields. Some nonprofit parks partners designed master plans for their facilities. But there was no citywide plan with goals for the scale of the system and the condition of its facilities.

The PlaNYC 2030 initiative is an important step toward such a plan. It identifies the goals of providing neighborhood parks within 10 minutes of every resident, improving certain regional parks, and planting more street trees. The plan is accompanied by proposed operating and capital budgets that provide resources to accomplish these goals.

However, comprehensive and strategic planning for parks should extend beyond the scope of the PlaNYC initiative. It should recognize the role of the state and federal government as well as public authorities and private facilities. A strategic plan should also integrate the Department of City Planning's goals for opening the waterfront with more public space, and it should address the structural problems evident in current facilities. The City's latest AIMS report identifies \$394 million in investments required to bring existing parks facilities to a state of good repair, and this inventory omits many smaller facilities. A strategic plan should provide for needed investments in older facilities as it anticipates expansion to meet new needs; both are important, and plans should not neglect the existing facilities in favor of expansion.

**3. Bring all parks to an acceptable condition.** According to the DPR's reports, 12 percent or about one of every eight parks is not maintained in an acceptable condition. Among large parks the share is 18 percent or about one of every six. The parks in poor condition are

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more likely to be in lower-income than in wealthier neighborhoods.

Improving one-eighth of the system is likely to require added funding, at least in the near term as productivity initiatives are being developed. Increases have already been budgeted for fiscal year 2008. In addition, the disparities among neighborhoods suggest that some reallocation might be appropriate, permitting gains in some areas without creating unacceptable conditions in others.

In the past, the DPR's operating budget was something of a political football. In tough times it was cut severely, because of the perception that maintenance is easily deferred and the service is less critical than other more "essential" services. In better times, resources are added in a politicized fashion, with Council Members and Borough Presidents seeking credit for the addition of funds earmarked to restore or enhance facilities and services in their jurisdictions. Because capital budget funds are more easily manipulated in this process, the capital budget is sometimes viewed as a substitute for the operating budget and offsets ongoing neglect in maintenance with more expensive (and attention grabbing) periodic replacement.

Advocates for the parks have responded to this fiscal volatility by seeking a fixed share of the total operating budget. One suggested solution is "one percent for the parks," meaning that one percent of the operating budget should be allocated to the DPR. This remedy has two faults. First, it is mathematically misguided. As shown earlier, when centrally funded costs such as employee pension contributions and legal judgments are taken into account, the DPR already receives more than one percent of the City's operating budget. Second, and more fundamental, any mathematical formula is inherently arbitrary with no logical foundation. For example, why should the funds for parks increase because the City's Medicaid cost are rising, or fall because waste and abuse in Medicaid have been curbed? The budget process should be one in which elected officials are able to set priorities.

The best strategy is for DPR's senior managers to establish objective standards for the resources required to maintain adequately different types of facilities. The standards will vary not just with the size of a park, but with the nature and intensity of its uses. The task is not simple, but developing defensible, publicly accessible estimates of the cost of maintaining different types of facilities, under different conditions of use, is essential to rational budgeting for the DPR.

**4. Improve productivity in parks maintenance and operations.** The adequate maintenance standards established for objective budgeting will be dynamic not static. Costs may rise due to inflation and other factors, but they can be lowered through innovations that improve productivity. DPR managers should be constantly seeking ways to lower costs through greater productivity.

Of course, improvements in productivity require sound ways of measuring it. The DPR's PIP program, especially as it has been improved in recent years, is an important tool that has aided management in many ways. But it still falls short of providing meaningful productivity measures. Managers need more than a reading of the condition of parks; they need information on how intensively the parks are used for different purposes. Productivity is a

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relationship between inputs and outputs; the dollars spent on parks should be related to an output gauge that reflects the condition of a park given the nature and volume of its use. It may be easier to keep a park in good condition if few people use it, but the DPR should be both maintaining parks adequately and encouraging their use. However, the DPR now has woefully inadequate data on the use of its facilities.

While better measurement is critical, a less quantitative concept related to productivity is “ownership.” It is widely believed that a sense of ownership will encourage better care of an asset, be it a home or a park. The nonprofit organizations that have established partnerships with the DPR for improving certain facilities embody this concept. These groups have taken a sense of ownership for their parks, and innovative practices have resulted. For example, the zone system of staff deployment developed by the Central Park Conservancy has been adopted by DPR. In order to improve productivity further, the DPR should experiment with allowing the conservancies greater responsibility for the management of DPR personnel and in-kind resources from the DPR.

For parks managed directly by the DPR, the agency should consider a renewed effort with the use of competitive contracting for maintenance. In the mid-1990s a successful effort was abandoned in favor of greater reliance on workers made available through welfare reform programs. These POP workers are now a major component in DPR staffing. But these need not be mutually exclusive policies. The DPR should experiment with competitive contracting with private maintenance firms and making the supervision of POP workers part of the contractual arrangements.

**5. Encourage preventive maintenance and longer periods of usefulness by funding routine repairs and replacements in the operating budget.** The DPR’s operating budget should include funds for repairs and regular replacement of many types of equipment and facilities.

This would represent a significant shift in policy, since these items are now included in the capital budget and funded with bond proceeds. Yet the case for the change is compelling. It would eliminate the current incentives for neglect of routine maintenance in favor of more periodic, but more expensive, replacement. It would require establishing and adhering to regular replacement cycles rather than politically driven choices among numerous facilities in need of major renovation. And it would lower debt service costs which include interest that could be avoided.

While funding routine replacement with operating revenues rather than borrowing would save significant sums in the long-run, it does pose a transitional problem. As the policy is implemented, the City will be obliged to pay from the operating budget both the debt service accrued due to past borrowing and the new cost of funding current replacement projects without borrowing. However, now may be the most favorable time to achieve this transition. Currently surplus funds are available and could be used to achieve this transition; in effect, beginning a pay-as-you-go capital program. Targeting this program to regular replacement needs will, in effect, permit the City to achieve a more meaningful balance in its budget by covering depreciation costs with its current revenues, a sound practice common in private industry and many public enterprises but not required of municipal governments.

**6. Common principles should guide the relationships between the DPR and its nonprofit partner organizations and the terms of arrangements should be transparent.** Clear and consistent policies should be established to encourage philanthropic support, define responsibilities, and allocate concession revenues. Documentation regarding the arrangements should be publicly available.

Through its nonprofit partners, the DPR already is securing about \$63 million for parks from private philanthropy. A key element in sustaining and enlarging this base is assuring donors that their gifts are not simply a substitution for public funds. Philanthropic support should supplement, not substitute for, the City's efforts. The best mechanism for assurance is maintenance of effort agreements between the City and the conservancies. That is, the City should guarantee some fixed level of support in exchange for a nonprofit group raising some targeted level of funds. This arrangement is incorporated in the City's agreement with the Central Park Conservancy. A suitable version of this approach should be developed for other nonprofit partners.

The reliance on philanthropy through park conservancies to supplement scarce public resources for parks produces inequities. There is no denying the simple fact that richer neighborhoods are better able to raise funds for their parks than poorer ones. The success of the Central Park Conservancy in fundraising is a clear illustration; the high income residents surrounding the park are the major source of its large donations. Pursuit of philanthropy should remain a strategy for raising new revenues, but the resulting inequities should be addressed. While philanthropic funds should not be fully offset by cuts in public support, there can be some benefit to the City treasury. These savings can be allocated to parks with less wealth in their surrounding neighborhood.

There also is a need for greater equity in the City's arrangements with its nonprofit partners. The multiple conservancies have differing arrangements in terms of City support financially and in kind, their ability to operate and benefit from concessions in their parks, and the role of public officials on their boards. Some diversity may be desirable in order to accommodate unique circumstances, but there is a growing impression among the increased number of organizations that the varying arrangements favor some groups over others. The City ought to define clearly its policies regarding non-profit partners, apply these guidelines fairly in accord with varying circumstances, and disclose the terms of all its arrangements.

## APPENDIX

### PLANNED PARK EXPANSIONS

This appendix briefly describes expansion projects under discussion or being planned by the City, State, or other public authorities.<sup>53</sup> This list refers to projects included in Table 6.

#### Bronx

- **Yankee Stadium** – The new Yankee Stadium will occupy 20.8 acres of parkland in Macombs Dam Park and Mullaly Park. In order to compensate for the loss of parkland, the DPR will spend \$245 million to create 24.5 acres of new recreational facilities and open space. Although there is a net gain in parks acreage, there has been resistance from community members because they claim that the large, open spaces provided by Macombs Dam Park cannot be fully substituted for by athletic fields, many of which will be built with synthetic turf.
- **Harlem River – Regatta Park** – This one-acre park will cost \$768,000, with \$280,000 from the City and \$480,000 from federal funds secured by Congressman Jose Serrano.
- **Melrose Commons Bronx River** – This one-acre site will be converted to parkland for \$2.5 million paid for with City funds.
- **Pugley Creek Park** – The DPR will build this 2.2-acre waterfront park and playground at a cost of \$850,000.
- **Ferry Point Golf** – During the Giuliani administration, the City entered into a contract with Ferry Point Partners to convert a 222-acre brownfield site in the Bronx into a Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course. The estimated cost of the project is \$59.6 million.
- **South Bronx Greenway** – The South Bronx Greenway is a project pioneered by the nonprofit groups, the Bronx River Alliance and Sustainable South Bronx, which will connect the Hunts Point and Port Morris waterfronts with a network of bicycle and pedestrian paths. With a \$1.25 million grant from the federal government, the nonprofit groups are designing the project in conjunction with the Economic Development Corporation.
- **Bronx River Greenway** – The Bronx River Alliance is also responsible for spearheading the development of the Bronx River Greenway. This project, which

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<sup>53</sup> Unless otherwise noted, data is from the New York City Office of Management and Budget.

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will include the restoration of existing parkland and the creation of new parkland, will cost a over \$144 million and will be funded through City, State, and Federal sources. The project will add 35 acres of new parkland, but will encompass over 400 acres and will stretch 23 miles, reaching Westchester County. The park will be maintained cooperatively by the DPR and the Bronx River Alliance.

- **Castle Hill Esplanade** – Located between Pugsley and Westchester Creeks in the Bronx, the Castle Hill Esplanade is being developed by the DPR as a three-acre waterfront park. Previously planned as a site for housing, the property has recently been conveyed to the DPR by a private developer.

## Brooklyn

- **Greenpoint-Williamsburg** – In May 2005, the City Council approved significant zoning changes in Greenpoint-Williamsburg in order to encourage housing development along the waterfront and upland areas in north Brooklyn. Part of the zoning plan creates incentives for private developers to transfer title of waterfront open space to the DPR. Though parks are still in the development phase, over 50 acres of new parkland is proposed and \$191 million from the City's four-year capital plan has been allocated for park development.
- **Atlantic Yards** – Forest City Ratner is planning to develop a basketball stadium and major residential and commercial real estate complex over the Atlantic rail yards in Brooklyn. As part of the plan, the developer has agreed to build seven acres of public parkland on the complex. The parks will be maintained by the developer.
- **Bush Terminal** – The Bush Terminal piers, located in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, had been used as industrial piers until the 1970s. The Economic Development Corporation is now planning to develop the 23-acre site into a park. The \$36 million needed for the development will be funded with \$9 million from the City, \$17.8 million from the State, and \$8 million from the federal Environmental Protection Agency.
- **Highland Reservoir** – In 2004, the City Department of Environmental Protection turned over the 50-acre Ridgewood Reservoir, located in Highland Park, to the Department of Parks and Recreation. The reservoir had not been in use since 1989. The Parks Department is currently planning to convert the acreage into parkland. Highland Park straddles Brooklyn and Queens. The site will cost \$60 million to develop and will be funded with City capital funds.
- **Brooklyn Bridge Park** – The Brooklyn Bridge Park Development Corporation, a subsidiary of the Empire State Development Corporation, is planning an 85-acre public park on the East River. The construction of the parks will cost roughly \$150 million. It will be funded by an \$85 million contribution from the State and \$65

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million from the City. The estimated yearly maintenance costs of \$15 million will be financed through the revenues derived from real estate development on the site. The development includes 1,240 units of housing, a hotel, and retail and commercial space.

- **Piers 7-12** –The Economic Development Corporation has recently taken over this property from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, and EDC is planning to develop it into a 4.5-acre waterfront park. The EDC is currently negotiating with the DPR over the maintenance responsibilities of the park.

## Manhattan

- **Hudson River Park** – Hudson River Park stretches from Lower Manhattan to 59<sup>th</sup> Street and encompasses 550 acres. About 400 of those acres are underwater. The Hudson River Park Trust, which was created by State law and is governed by a board with State and City appointees, is responsible for the planning, design, construction and operation of the park. Roughly a third of the parkland (about 33 acres) is currently open to the public. Its operations are funded through contributions from private donations and revenues generated through commercial uses of the park.
- **Riverside South** – The Riverside South Planning Corporation was created in 1991 to develop a real estate project and parks over the 52-acre site of the former New York Central Railroad yards. The 29-acre public park will be built with private money and then will be conveyed to the DPR; it will maintain the park with funding from the owners of the real estate. The site will cost the City roughly \$6.5 million to develop.
- **United Nations Waterfront** – It has long been the ambition of the City to build parkland along the waterfront in Turtle Bay, but the UN has protested, citing security concerns. However, the new UN headquarters will be built on land in Robert Moses Park. In order to mitigate the loss in parkland, the UN has agreed to build a waterfront esplanade from East 41<sup>st</sup> Street to East 51<sup>st</sup> Street.
- **High Line Park** – Construction on the High Line Park began in April 2006. The new park will be a renovation of the west side elevated rail structure that runs from Gansevoort Street to 34<sup>th</sup> Street. The seven-acre park will cost roughly \$160 million, with approximately \$118 million from the City, \$20 million from the federal government, and the remainder from private sources.
- **East River Waterfront** – The Lower Manhattan Development Corporation has given the Economic Development Corporation a \$150 million grant to build a waterfront open space along the East River in Lower Manhattan. The plan includes an esplanade and cladding to mitigate the noise from the elevated FDR drive. It is unclear how the park will be maintained once it is built.



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- **Governor's Island** – In 2003, ownership of Governor's Island was transferred from the federal government to New York State. The Governor's Island Preservation and Education Corporation (GIPEC) were created to oversee development of 150 of the 172 acres on the island (the other 22 acres remain under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service). GIPEC is governed by a board of equal numbers of State and City appointees. Approximately 16 acres will be developed as parkland.
- **Hudson Yards** – A major component of the Hudson Yards development plan is to create open space. The bulk of the 20 acres of new parks will be located on a tree-lined boulevard that will stretch from 33<sup>rd</sup> to 39<sup>th</sup> Streets between 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Avenues. There will also be a six-acre public square between 30<sup>th</sup> and 33<sup>rd</sup> streets. The development of these open spaces will be financed with bonds issued by the Hudson Yards Infrastructure Corporation, a local public authority.
- **Battery Park City Teardrop Park** – This small (0.7-acre) park along the Hudson River waterfront has recently been developed by the Battery Park City Authority. The park features innovative designs for waterfalls and fountains.
- **West Harlem Piers** – This site, which will extend from 125<sup>th</sup> to 135<sup>th</sup> streets along the Hudson River, is being developed by the EDC as a waterfront park. The total \$18.7 million cost is being funded from federal, state, and city sources.
- **Harlem River Park** – This 20-acre waterfront park is currently being developed by the DPR. Located on a former brownfield site, this park will stretch from 131<sup>st</sup> Street to 145<sup>th</sup> Street along the Harlem River and will contain bicycle and pedestrian paths.
- **Southpoint and Octagon Park** – These two parks, which will total 29 acres, are being developed by the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation on Roosevelt Island. The parks will cost \$4 million to develop.

## Queens

- **Aqueduct Racetrack** – The New York Racing Authority, which operates the Aqueduct Racetrack in Ozone, Queens, filed for bankruptcy in November 2006. The DPR is interested in converting the site into park land.
- **Arverne Waterfront** – In 2004, the City Department of Housing and Preservation began development of property in Arverne in Queens. Part of the plan is to develop 27 acres of park land. The project is in the early design phase and is estimated to cost \$42 million to build.

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- **Elmhurst Gas Tanks** – In 2004, Keyspan sold the City a 6.1-acre plot of land in Elmhurst, Queens for \$1. Since that time, the City has dedicated \$16 million in capital funds to convert that plot into parkland.
- **Sunnyside Yards** – An Economic Development Corporation paper leaked to the press in May 2006 called for substantial development over a platform on the Sunnyside Yards in Queens. As many as 35,000 housing units would be built on the 43-acre site and parkland would also likely be constructed.
- **Cresthaven Site** – City Councilmember Tony Avella has called for a 6.5-acre park to be built on the Cresthaven property, formerly owned by Catholic Charities, in Whitestone, Queens. Senior housing was intended to be built on the site, but federal funding designated for the project never materialized. The DPR has not announced any plans for the site.
- **Queens West** – This 12-acre waterfront park is currently under design by the DPR. It is intended to complement a large middle-class housing complex being built in Long Island City,
- **Silvercup West** – Land adjacent to the Silvercup Studios in Long Island City is planned for development as a large housing complex. Part of the development plan, overseen by the EDC, is to build a one-acre park.
- **Fort Totten** – This 11-acre site, formerly owned by the US military, has recently been conveyed to the DPR for use as parkland. The site is currently under construction and will cost roughly \$15 million.

## Staten Island

- **Fresh Kills Park** – The Fresh Kills site in Staten Island served as the City's principal landfill from 1948 to 2001 and at 2,200 acres was one of the largest landfills in the world. Since its closure, the City has worked to safely seal the landfill and convert it to a park. Still in environmental review, Fresh Kills Park is planned to be built in three ten-year segments at a cumulative cost of about \$650 million. Of this figure, roughly \$251 million will go towards closing the landfill and safely sealing waste, \$150 million will be used during the first ten-year construction phase, \$143 million for the second phase, and \$80 million for the third and final phase.
- **Mariner's Marsh** – On June 6, 2006, Mayor Bloomberg announced the receipt of \$600,000 from the federal Environmental Protection Agency to clean a brownfield site in Mariner's Marsh, Staten Island. The 107-acre site will later be converted into parkland.

## Making the Most of Our Parks

- **Goodhue Site** – The City will acquire roughly 35 acres from the Goodhue Center, a community center run by the Children’s Aid Society in Staten Island. The property will become parkland at an estimated cost to the City of \$9 million.
- **Fairview Park** – A 42-acre park with recreation and athletic facilities was supposed to be completed in 2004 to coincide with the opening of an adjacent shopping mall. However, the project was stalled because courts ruled that the City had failed to conduct a proper Environmental Impact Statement. The park will cost roughly \$7 million to develop.
- **Stapleton Waterfront Park and Esplanade** – This land was formerly a US Navy base. The City Council recently approved a plan to develop the site for housing. Part of the plan will be to build a 12-acre waterfront park. This park will be built and maintained by the DPR.
- **North Shore Waterfront Park** – The Trust for Public Land recently bought this site from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. Plans are underway to clean the site and develop it into a waterfront park. The land will be eventually conveyed to the DPR.

The projects described above would each add to local parkland. In addition to this type of expansion project, the DPR is also considering major improvements to existing facilities. These projects are listed below.

- **The High Bridge** – High Bridge Park is a pedestrian walkway from Manhattan to the Bronx. A private organization, the High Bridge Rehabilitation Project, is raising money to restore the bridge. The City has committed \$65 million for the restoration, and Congressman Jose Serrano has earmarked \$3 million in federal funds for the project.
- **Soundview Park** – Soundview Park is a partially developed 156-acre park built on a landfill. The City will renovate the entire park at a cost of \$44 million. This project is part of larger, long-term project to build a Greenway along the Bronx River.
- **Dyker Beach Junior Golf** – On November 1, 2006, Mayor Bloomberg announced the construction of an 11.8-acre youth golf course on unused land in Dyker Beach. The six-hole facility will be free to children ages 5-17. Funding for the \$6 million project includes \$1.5 million from the City, \$1.5 million from the State, and \$3 million from the private City Parks Foundation. City Parks Foundation will pay American Golf to maintain the golf course.
- **Fort Washington** – In 2003, the DPR received a \$2 million grant from the federal government to construct a 1,700 foot trail through Fort Washington Park in

## Making the Most of Our Parks

Manhattan. This trail provides the final link in the 13.5-mile Hudson River Greenway. The total cost of the project will be roughly \$46 million.

- **Idlewild Nature Center** – Idlewild Park is a “Forever Wild” park near JFK Airport in Queens. There has been pressure by some community groups to build a nature center and trails in Idlewild Park. So far there has been no formal announcement by the City to begin such a project.
- **Flushing Meadows Corona Park Pool and Rink** – The DPR is constructing a \$69 million indoor pool and ice rink in Flushing Meadows Corona Park in Queens. Construction began in 2004 and will likely be completed in 2007.
- **Bloomingdale Woods** – The City has discussed clearing the 138-acre forested park in Staten Island in order to build a new recreation center. Opponents of the project argue that the forests should be protected. The project will cost roughly \$13 million to develop.